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WEEKLY

RED STAR MAGAZINE 7-19

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The Legion Fights On--

Sands of Sahara

ROBERT CARSE

Frank Bunce
Philip Ketchum
Robert Arthur

Warhead

RICHARD SALE

The Men of the Desert Will Never Yield Until the Sun Grows Cold.

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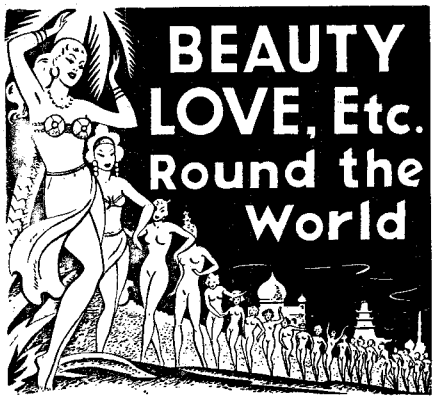

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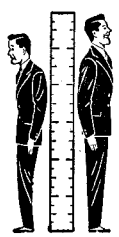

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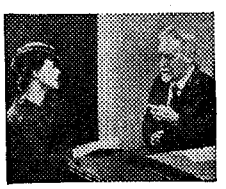

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28x5.25-18	2.45	1.15
29x5.25-19	2.45	1.15
30x5.25-20	2.50	1.15
31x5.25-21	2.80	1.15
5.50-17	2.75	1.15
28x5.50-18	2.75	1.15
29x5.50-19	2.75	1.15
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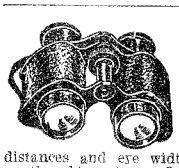

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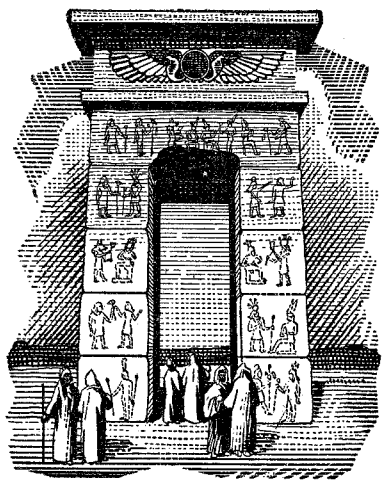

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ARGOSY

America's Oldest and Best All-Fiction Magazine

Volume 309 | CONTENTS FOR JULY 19, 1941 | Number 3

Looking Ahead

SWORDS IN EXILE

Salute the Cardinal's men! They ride to battle again, those two rakehellies, Cleve and d'Entreville; they travel a twisting and perilous road into traitors' paradise. Richelieu has commanded, and so there will be dark work to do, and the glitter of brave steel. A stirring novel of Old France by

MURRAY R. MONTGOMERY

♦

FIVE ACES WEST

He's a sinner, dressed up in fancy clothes; he fights and he plays poker, and sometimes gets drunk. But even to these men of faith, these weary Mormons on the muddy trail to Utah, he can give a few sound lessons in Christian charity. Grab a handcart, brother, and push, shoulder to shoulder with the Samaritan of Spades. A stirring novel of the West in growing pains, by

CLIFF FARRELL

♦

MAN BITES CHAMP

Tennis is a gentleman's game—or so you think. The trouble is, once in a while somebody heading for the championship never learned to be a gentleman; or, in plainer language, a square shooter. Which complicates things for one young college graduate on the way up. An ace short story by

WILLIAM R. COX

♦

Coming in Next Week's Argosy—July 26

SANDS OF SAHARA—*Novelet* . . . . . **Robert Carse** 6
France in Africa: the old lieutenant knew what it meant, the young one learned—when they had gone through flaming Hell together

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If the doctor thought Bill was all through with battle, that was because he couldn't guess about the tin fish on Mako Key

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OBSTINATE UNCLE OTIS—*Short Story* . . . . . **Robert Arthur** 33
We give you Vermont's stubbornest man: the only person whose lack of faith could unmove mountains

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Not to die for liberty, but to fight for it: that was the gift of Odin's cup to one hero of our Revolution

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Captain Robert Davies of the Suicide Squad

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Shall the tyrant ever say: "Tomorrow America will die"?

MEN WHO MAKE THE ARGOSY—Charles Marquis Warren . . 56

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This magazine is on sale every Wednesday

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WILLIAM T. DEWART, President & Treasurer — WILLIAM T. DEWART, JR., Secretary
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THIS poster, painted by Leslie Ragan, is the first in a series portraying the vital importance of Selective Service in America's national defense program.

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Here are three of America's young citizen soldiers—SELECTED FOR SERVICE and inducted into the United States Army because they are fit for military service, because they are available for military service and because they can best serve their country in the armed forces. Alert and fit, well trained and well equipped, they have been SELECTED FOR SERVICE on the military front.

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To feed our fighting men, our men in industry and our nation, other millions—necessary to America's national defense agricultural program—have been deferred from military service. They have been SELECTED FOR SERVICE on the agricultural front.

•

Still other millions—not yet needed are deferred from military service to continue in their regular civilian activities and carry on the normal economic, social and commercial life of our nation. They have been SELECTED FOR SERVICE on the home front.

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Through the Selected Service System — every man serves. Those who registered have volunteered to serve in the defense of their country. They are just as truly American volunteers as any who have served their country since the Minute Men at Concord fired the shot heard 'round the world and said, "We will live in freedom or die fighting for it."

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Man does not live by bread alone—nor can he defend his home by guns alone.

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Sands of Sahara

These ancient and terrible sands have always been a battle-ground; and they are today. But they are, too, the last outpost of France's liberty; shifting, they make unconquered land—where two Frenchmen, determined to prove their different kinds of courage, can find glory

By Robert Carse

Author of "Fugitives Two," "Stepsons of France," etc.

I

THE camels moved softly in the cold darkness, weary from the long journey. Then Bel Hadi, who led, smelled the well water in the village and whinnied. Segaix leaned forward across the saddle bow and stroked the beast's slender white neck. "Easy," he told Bel Hadi in Taureg. "They will know soon enough that we're coming."

Behind, the other camels in the column took up the whinnying. The young ones, who had never before been out of the high pasture of the Hoggar, jerked excitedly at the lead-ropes and the Chaambi troopers were forced to strike them with their long riding sticks.

Segaix turned and made a sign with his hand. Little, skinny Baba Ould Abidin, his sergeant-major, drew alongside of him. "Go ahead and warn the sentries," Segaix said. "There was a war on when we left. Maybe they'll take us for an attack group."

Shadows stretching blue-black from the date palms at the edge of the irrigation canal around the village fell across Abidin as he advanced. He was lost to Segaix's sight. Only his voice came back, shouting for a sentry.

Segaix slowed the camel.

A thick strange voice answered Abidin. Lights threw a yellow blur in the post, and suddenly a flashlight beam cut down from the *mirador* tower above the parapet. Abidin returned at a quick trot. He did what for him was a rare thing and saluted Segaix.

"Black men, Senegalese, guard the place, *Sidi,*" he said. "The one I talked to says you no longer command here."

"Then who does?" Segaix said, his body straight.

Abidin shrugged. He was sliding his carbine out of the saddle boot. "The black didn't say, except that it was another Francés."

"Put that back," Segaix said. "We don't shoot Frenchmen."

He rode into the village and along the narrow street

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Morbelot had sprung from the exploding car, there at the wall of the fortress

toward the post with the searchlight glare in his eyes. A Negro trooper wearing a red woolen cap and khaki had tried to halt him at the end of the street, but he had banged the man over the shoulder with his camel stick. This was El Gouar, he kept angrily thinking. He was Emile Segaix, senior lieutenant of the Saharan Companies. He was supposed to command here. Where the hell was Voelkel?

Voelkel met him at the drawbridge over the moat into the post. The Austrian sergeant-major gave him a sheepish salute. "Got a new commander, *mon Lieutenant*," he mumbled up to Segaix. "But you look in good shape."

"Fine," Segaix said, because he and Voelkel were old friends. "Now"—his voice deepened with rage—"now show me the guy who's supposed to outrank Segaix at El Gouar."

"He's in the compound," Voelkel said, "right in front of your quarters. He's waiting for you."

SEGAIX got down stiffly from the saddle. He left Bel Hadi in the kneeling position and took three rapid strides forward. Then he halted and saluted the tall man who stood in the doorway. "Segaix, senior lieutenant of the El Gouar mobile group," he pronounced. "Who are you?"

The other man wore clean, freshly pressed khaki and the black kepi of the colonial infantry. He also wore the double gold stripes of a senior lieutenant, Segaix noted, although the tanned, wide-boned face was quite young. He held out his hand to Segaix after he had answered the salute.

"Alain Morbelot," he said. "Senior lieutenant of *tirailleurs*, serving on detached duty. Took over your job as a commandant here more than a month ago, Lieutenant."

Segaix made a growling sound. "Show me," he said, "your orders for that."

"Perhaps we had better go inside," Morbelot said. He seemed very embarrassed, and glanced aside at Voelkel.

"Don't mind who's around," Segaix said. "There's never any secrets at El Gouar." But then he motioned to Voelkel. "Open up my place."

Segaix's room had been locked ever since Morbelot had been at the post, and now he stared curiously as the ser-

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geant-major thrust back the sand-jammed door and turned on the gasoline pressure lamp. The mud brick walls and tile floor were quite bare. A few garments, most of them of native design and manufacture, hung from pegs.

There was a small, richly colored prayer rug on the floor, and Segaix indicated it and said, "Sit down."

"Thanks," Morbelot said, feeling his embarrassment increase. He wished that the other man would also sit.

But Segaix stood by the doorway. He was taking off his long face-cloth and *gandourah,* shaking the sand from them. Then he unbuckled his pistol belt, slung it from a wall peg. "Let me see your orders," he said.

Morbelot held the sheaf of papers up to him. "They may not make any sense to you," he said. "You don't seem to know that the war is over, and that France lost it. Italy came in with Germany at the end."

"No," Segaix slowly said. Then he said it again. "No . . . ." His dark hands tightened on the papers. "I've been in the Hoggar with the herd for three months. But the Targui there had no news. Voelkel didn't send me any word. Voelkel, you thick-skulled—"

The sergeant-major held himself motionless just outside the doorway. "I sent in two guys, *Sidi,*" he said. "Bou Alad and Bou Moktar. Senussi from over in Libya got both of them. Then"—he pointed—"this lieutenant showed up with his detachment and his orders, and he told me not to risk sending any more men."

"*Très bien,*" Segaix said. "Go to the commissary and draw the double Martiniquan ration for me. Then I want to be alone with the lieutenant."

Color had gone from his face. Patches of white showed where the high cheekbones pressed against the taut skin. He read the orders aloud in a soft voice, then he pushed them into the waistband of his baggy native trousers. "But Africa is safe," he said.

"Yes," Morbelot said, "Africa is safe." That sentence was the key to Segaix's character, he thought. The man had become more African than French.

The thin, long face with the big beak nose and extremely deep-set eyes had taken the quality of leather from the years of Saharan sun and wind. Even the feet in the broad-soled antelope sandals were thickly calloused. It was probable that Segaix could no longer get his feet into a pair of regulation field boots. His one identifying mark of authority was the faded azure blue kepi with the Moslem crescent and star insignia, but he had pitched that off into a corner.

"YOU had better tell me," Segaix said, "about the fall of France." He crouched on his heels, his knees spread. "I've been *beylik* here for a long time."

Morbelot took out and lit a cigarette, then nervously extended the case to Segaix. "I'm new in the Sahara," he said. "I don't know what *beylik* means."

"It means 'France in Africa'," Segaix said. His voice was flat, without emotion, but his hands slightly trembled.

"The Maginot Line wasn't enough," Morbelot said in abrupt haste. "They got around it, the Nazis. They broke through the Lowlands and across the Albert Canal."

"Where were you?"

"I was a reserve officer, and they called me back last August, put me in as a commissary officer at the colonial troop base at Frejus. You see, in civilian life I'm a lawyer, and they thought I'd do all right in the commissary. Frejus is quite a big base."

"I know it," Segaix said. "That's my coast. I come from Marseille."

He looked down at his hands, but he didn't see them. He was envisioning France, France fallen and the German boots banging the Paris cobbles. France . . . . For him the word had become a bitter, lovely and vague dream, and until now he had not known just how much he loved her. He looked at the younger man. Morbelot was nearly on the verge of tears, he saw. Maybe that was part of the reason for what had happened in France. A reservist, a civilian lawyer, had been popped from the commissary to the Sahara and El Gouar. The orders explained it, but the colonel who had written them at Timbuktu was either a fool or not in his right mind.

"Tell me about the defeat," he said. "Was there any fighting down around Frejus?"

"No," Morbelot said. He wished he didn't have to do this. It brought all the old, violent emotion back, made him ready to weep. But there was a degree of contempt in Segaix's attitude, and it was obvious that the Saharan thought that he hadn't fought. "They put me into a Senegalese rifle company the first week in May. We were sent up between Sedan and Metz."

"How did the Belgians act?"

"Not too good. The men fought well, but there was no coördination, and after four days, Leopold capitulated."

"*Vache!*" Segaix said.

"He was trapped," Morbelot said. "The German dive-bombers were strafing all the roads, bombs, then machine-gun work, close down."

"Wait," Segaix said. Voelkel was at the door. He carried Segaix's huge camel saddle over his shoulder and there were four bottles of rum in his hands. Segaix took the saddle and the rum. "Sit on that," he told Morbelot. "Here's a drink."

Morbelot lifted his bottle in unison with Segaix. "To France," Segaix said. "*Toujours, la France.*"

THE rum was strong, and in the hot room went rapidly to Morbelot's head. He talked in a swift and more excited voice. Here, he thought, was a man who had been out breeding camels in the Tuareg pastures of the central Sahara while he had fought in the desperate defense of France. Segaix considered himself an extraordinarily fine fighting man. Well, then, let him listen:

"We helped hold the Germans out of Dunkerque, my outfit did. The British Expeditionary Force was in full retreat. A Scottish division, and some of our marines, and the *tirailleurs,* kept the road closed for them. They sailed in everything they could find, or could get over from across the Channel. We got a terrific whipping."

"Imaginable," Segaix said. He was gazing at Morbelot, his gray eyes narrow. "How many of you got out?"

"Thirty of my outfit. We got through to Bordeaux by boat. The Scottish were murdered, every last man, and most of the marines. We landed in Bordeaux the night before the government asked for armistice."

Segaix cursed. He got up and strode the room. "Go on," he said. "Talk. Tell me."

"The Old Man, Petain, is running France. The Germans split it up in two parts. They took everything they—"

"Marseille?"

"No, they left Marseille. But the German agents are all through the unoccupied zone, and just before I left

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France for here, the British fleet shelled our fleet at Mers-el-Krebir. Over a thousand of our lads were killed."

Segaix walked to the doorway and back, slowly, in long strides. "Why," he said, "did they send you here? This is the Tenere, the edge of the Big Sahara. It takes a man who knows the country."

"Weygand sent me. He was commander-in-chief at the end. It was his idea that Africa must certainly be saved for France. Then, there were men who refused to accept the terms of the armistice and went over to fight with the British. So I was sent to Senegal with my *tirailleurs*, and on up to Timbuktu, and from there to here."

"That colonel at Timbuktu," Segaix said, "doesn't suspect my loyalty?" He had stopped in front of Morbelot, and he held the rum bottle by the neck.

"No," Morbelot said. "But a young French general named de Gaulle is trying to start a 'free force' in Occidental Africa. The colonel thought that El Gouar should be reinforced and mechanized."

"With what?"

Morbelot almost blushed, and then was furious with himself for his emotion. "I brought in ten Ford automobiles with me," he said. "This post is on the Transaharan route to Timbuktu. Any big raiding party striking at the Niger and Gao or Timbuktu would pass through here."

"Vache," Segaix said. He was laughing. His bottle was empty, and he flipped it out onto the compound sand, uncorked a new one. "Listen to me, Mister Reservist. When I was a kid at home in Marseille, the *simoom* used to blow sand from Africa into the streets. I came out with the zouaves in '06. My outfit helped take Fez. Gallieni, Joffre, Lyautey, all the colonial old-timers, I knew them. Lyautey gave me my Military Medal, and my commission. Then I joined the Saharan Companies. . . . Haven't you heard of me?"

"They told me a bit about you," Morbelot said, "down at Timbuktu. But we got a report there that Voelkel was in touch by radio with the de Gaullist people. The colonel had the idea Voelkel might get some of the Chaambi here in the village to ride out with him."

"Against whom and where?" Segaix did not pause to give the other man time to answer. The shock of the news about France had aroused his fierce, intense nature. Memories of the past came swiftly into his brain. He was proud, he told himself, and had a right to it. This young *ksouri* here, this city kid with his slick boots and lawyer's drawl, didn't even know the meaning of *beylik*. The Sahara to him was something big and pale pink on a map.

"Le Père Blanc, de Foucauld, shared quarters with me at Tamanrasset," he told Morbelot. "I was with Captain Charlet at the Combat of Esseyen. We rode eight hundred kilometers in ten days. They brought me back with a bullet through my thigh, and there wasn't any water the last three days. I was on my back in hospital for a couple of years with that.

"When I got out, they were fighting the other war. Lyautey sent me back here. I was the only *Francés* for thousands of kilometers. On patrol, I rode from here to Fort Polignac to Fort Flatters to In Silah and back. Try that in one of your tinpot Fords. A hundred Chaambi and me, men like Baba Ould Abidin, my *marechal de logis,* and a couple of old Legionnaires like Voelkel, held the Big Sahara for France.

"If Voelkel wants to join up with this de Gaullist outfit and do a little real fighting, I think it's a pretty fair idea. You'd better take your Fords and run them into the Niger. They aren't doing France or the Saharan Companies any good at El Gouar."

Alain Morbelot got erect. He was a little drunk and he staggered. But he pulled the sheaf of orders out from Segaix's waistband and buttoned them inside his tunic pocket.

"Thanks for the rum," he said, "and all the personal history. I'm going to bed. Please recall, though, that I command here, Lieutenant. I'll see you at inspection in the morning. If you have a report to make on your trip to the Hoggar, present it in writing before noon."

"Very nice," Segaix said. He cursed in Chaamba. "My report is this. I brought back fifty-seven remounts from the Hoggar. The pasture, for the dry season, is in good shape. The *sbot,* the *morokoba* and *oum rokba* are flourishing. The *oum rokba* has a heavier stalk than last year. Now get to hell out of my sight."

Morbelot paused at the door and meticulously met his heels and saluted. "Good night," he repeated.

Segaix just missed him with the rum bottle.

II

THE water in the shower had been tepid from the sun, and his head held a dull banging from the rum. But Segaix stood straight and walked evenly as the bugle sounded for inspection. You're Segaix, he thought. Don't let the kid make a monkey out of you. This is your post, and your inspection.

His Chaamba troopers were drawn up in double rank of group before the stable, he saw as he crossed the compound. But Abidin wasn't there, and Voelkel was out in the middle of the square with Morbelot. Behind Morbelot and lined along the war wall were the red-capped Senegalese standing at attention before their cars.

The cars were all old T-model Fords, with brass radiators and high, clumsy tops. Segaix was tempted to laugh. A heavy-duty Hotchkiss machine-gun was mounted on the right runningboard of each car, and ammunition belts were led in through the blocks of the guns. Morbelot wanted him, Segaix, to know who was in command of El Gouar.

Segaix took a deep breath and yelled to Voelkel. "To me!" he said.

Voelkel came on the double.

"Where's Abidin?"

"In the can, *Sidi,"* Voelkel said, his square face shiny with sweat. "The other lieutenant slung him in a couple of minutes ago."

"Under whose orders?"

"His own, I guess, *Sidi.* Abidin was over at the market in the village selling some of the camels the outfit brought in last night. The other lieutenant—that young punk—sent a corporal's guard out after him. He said that Abidin had no right or permission to sell anything that was government property."

Segaix flexed his hands. Muscles pulled tight around his jaw. "You shouldn't call any officer a punk," he said. "Leave that for me. What did Abidin do when they pinched him?"

"He kicked the corporal in the belly, and about tore the ear off one of the other blacks."

"Fall in with the outfit. Keep your temper. We don't want any trouble here."

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"How are you going to fix it, *Sidi?*" Voelkel's voice was troubled. "This Morbelot isn't the kind to back down easy."

"If he doesn't," Segaix said, "I'll have to whip him. We can't have the village laughing at the *beylik*."

Segaix stopped a pace from Morbelot. "My sergeant-major gives me to understand," he said, "that you've put my *marechal de logis* in jail. With whose authority?"

"My own," Morbelot said. His handsome, even-featured face was set and he stood with his weight a bit forward. "The *marechal de logis* was attempting to sell government-owned camels to civilians. As you no doubt know, that's not permitted by army regulations."

"I've got a hangover," Segaix said, "and a lot of work to do. So I'll be brief. Each and every trooper in the Saharan Companies is a volunteer. The same men must buy at least two mounts at their own expense before they are accepted for service. If they want to sell any mounts at any time, that's their own privilege. But if you argue that, my own camel, Bel Hadi, has sired fourteen of the beasts we brought back. I haven't been paid in eight months. Add up my back pay and put it against the camels Abidin wanted to sell. Then, later on we can settle the issue between us through a little radio talk with Timbuktu."

"No we can't," Morbelot said. "It's settled now. There are no camels to be sold at this post. I'm in command, and I've already given that order. Argue the point further with me and I'll have you confined to quarters until you're relieved of your duties by superior direction.

"I must tell you that I'm not at all satisfied with your absence from your post for three months while your country was at war. Neither am I content with your conduct with me last night. You make it necessary for me to say that in my estimation you have lost your sense of responsibility as a Frenchman and an officer."

"So?" Segaix said. Then he poised himself and with a long right-handed punch struck Morbelot on the jaw.

Morbelot got up and came immediately back at him. "You're mistaken to fight, Segaix," he said, but he was striking as he said it.

THEY fought for nearly an hour. The Chaamba troopers in their white robes and then the Senegalese broke ranks and closed about them in a surging, yelling ring. The sentries left their posts to watch, and men and women and children came in across the drawbridge from the village.

Segaix grinned as he saw them. He liked this. When this was over, he promised himself, they'd all know for sure who was *beylik* here.

Morbelot fought with a lot of power and skill. When he was a boy in his home town of Giverny he had been the champion boxer of his *lycée*. Later, when he had been taking his law course in Paris, he had gone to a lot of the fights at the Cirque d'Hiver and the Velodrome. He was younger and faster than Segaix, he told himself, and right was on his side. He fought for France, and for law and order.

A ringing upper cut to the jaw knocked him down once, and he got up groggily to walk into a *savate* kick. Segaix was a Marseillais, he recalled, and the Provençals were masters of the *savate*. But the other man must be in winded and desperate shape to use it, or he would have begun his kicking tactics at the start of the fight.

He began cautiously circling Segaix, learning how the kick was delivered. Segaix was really tired, he noticed. The man's eyes were bloodshot and his breathing spattered saliva from his cut lips. As Segaix advanced to strike, his footwork was wavering and his fist blows clumsy.

Get him to kick at you again, Morbelot thought. Get that foot in the air, then catch and yank it. You'll dump him flat on his back and he'll be a goner.

Segaix came in puffing, and drove a left jab for the head. He was very tired, and his vision was unclear. The blow missed; his arm wrenched on through space. Kick, his mind said. Give him the *savate*. He sent the *savate* with all his strength and it was only as he felt Morbelot's fingers clenching about his bare ankle that he knew he was trapped.

He landed jarring on his back. Sand stung his eyes; and blood. The sun was huge and burning in his vision. Then he saw Morbelot's face. It was almost as big as the sun, and came closer. "Give up, Segaix?"

"Yes, I do." The words were spoken as though another man had said them, and not he, Emile Segaix.

Morbelot pulled him to his feet. Segaix saw the other faces around him, Voelkel's, staring, strange, and the faces of the Chaambi and the Senegalese. One of the village women whom he could not see called, "He has hurt you, *Sidi*. Don't let him hurt you any more."

"I won't," he mumbled to her. Then he got loose from Morbelot and went through the crowd. He went into his room and closed the door. It was dark with the door shut, and he was grateful for the dark.

He stretched out with his head against his saddle and soaked a cloth in the water jar. Then he bathed his face and hands. The boy whipped you, he thought. Segaix, you've been beaten in a fight for the first time since you put on your officer's stripes. How did it hapen? Why is this big, stupid, strong kid here?

He kept repeating the question over and over, and finally it became confused with the fall of France. A sense of great, permanent disaster possessed him. He had the desire to weep, and tears rolled down his cheeks. Then in exhaustion he slept.

THE flies that crawled the cuts on his face awakened him. He could tell by the sounds from the compound and the village that it was dark outside. "Segaix," he said aloud, "you're no longer *beylik* of El Gouar. The men in the north don't want you. But up in the Hoggar the Tuargui will still be your friends. They won't know about this, or care if you tell them."

He turned around in the gray darkness and traced with his finger the maker's name written in Arabic characters on his saddle. It was a very fine saddle, fashioned with thorn and with no metal in it. That was his, he thought, and Bel Hadi, "the North Star," was his. So was his rifle on the wall.

The silver work on the stock of the rifle was cool against his sweaty palm. To feel it comforted and steadied him. He dressed quickly in riding clothing, filled two water sacks and a haversack with millet and honey and dates. The he slung the saddle from his shoulder, picked up the sacks and the rifle.

A Senegalese sentry paced the curved archway leading to the drawbridge gate, but the man did not seem to notice him as he passed. He turned left past the drawbridge

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toward the picket line. Chaambi guarded the camels, their carbines shoulder-slung. They welcomed him in low, grave voices, and their corporal said that Voelkel and Baba Ould Abadin wanted a word with him.

"I haven't time," he said. "If they want word with me, they'll find me in the high pasture, in the Hoggar."

Bel Hadi had snorted and knelt, seeing the saddle. Segaix secured it and then slung the water and food sacks in place. Bel Hadi rose before he could touch the quivering neck.

"We can go with you?" the Chaambi asked him. "This other is not our *sidi.*"

"You are men who own yourselves and your beasts," he said. "If it suits you, come to the Hoggar. But make no trouble here. This other *sidi* is a strong man, a stronger man than the one you see."

Bel Hadi ran at the lope through the village. Past the palm groves, the night wind came fresh and full. Bel Hadi's stride lengthened, and Segaix lowered in the saddle. He did not look back, but somewhere in the post a whistle was blowing and men shouted.

III

FLIES climbed up right into the ink bottle as Morbelot tried to write. He might use the typewriter, he thought, but his hands were swollen from yesterday's fight with Segaix, and in any event all typing here at the post was supposed to be done by Voelkel. He cleared his throat and called for the sergeant-major.

Voelkel had been trained in the old Legion; he kept his face straight when he entered. "The lieutenant has need of me?" he asked.

"Yes," Morbelot said, keenly watching him. "I want to get a report off to Timbuktu about yesterday's happenings."

"The lieutenant could transmit his report by wireless."

"Damn you!" Morbelot said. "Do you think I want every post in the desert, and also the de Gaullists, to know about that shindig?"

Voelkel was impassive. "The radio is the best means of communication here, my lieutenant," he said. "Our former commander always used it. He believed in saving men and camels."

"You mean Segaix, and by mentioning him you mean insult to me." Morbelot rose almost upright from behind the desk. "Let's get this straight between us, man. I know you're using the radio secretly at night. I know that you're in touch with the de Gaullist forces on the coast. But don't attempt any more tricks on me, or I'll have you shot. Men of your Germanic blood have been known to be traitors to France in the past, and I'm ready for you."

"Two of my brothers died in the Ernst Thaelmann Battalion of the International Bridgades in Spain," Voelkel said quietly. "They were both on the Hitler death list when they went to fight there. Maybe you can take my stripes and medals from me, Lieutenant, but I won them fighting for France. If I'm guilty of any crime, you will have to prove it in military court."

"*Assez,*" Morbelot said. "All I'm giving you is a warning. Send in those villagers with their complaints. When I'm through with them, I want to see the *marechal de logis,* Abidin."

"Very good, Lieutenant," Voelkel said. He was saluting. "But I don't think you'll see Abidin."

"Why not?"

"He escaped from his cell last night, Lieutenant. Somehow, he slipped out and got to the picket line, and stole three camels. The sentries say, of course, that they didn't see him."

Morbelot cursed. He came around the desk and grasped the sergeant-major by the shoulders. "Did you help in the escape?"

"Listen, Lieutenant," Voelkel said, nearly whispering. "The compound is full of folks. Some of them can understand French, and all of them were proud to be Segaix's friends. Hadn't you better wait until later to talk to me?"

"Very good," Morbelot said. He felt very young, and a fool. He slipped back behind the desk and took up his pen. "Send in that fellow who's supposed to have beaten his wife. And send in the blind chap to handle the *pankah.* This place is stifling."

The Chaamba villagers shuffled across the doorsill one after the other. They talked rapidly, with quick, jerky gestures, and all of them were unwashed and left their odors in the room. The blind Negro over in the corner did his best with the *pankah* mat, but it was difficult to move the heat-thick air. The Negro was of the Peuhl tribe, from the South, and a former slave saved by Segaix from a Braber raiding party. Anywhere he looked around here, Morbelot thought, he saw evidences of Segaix's fighting skill and authority.

It was manifest in the manner of the Chaamba people who came to make their complaints. He was a lawyer by profession, and he had painfully learned their language. Yet each of them, even the women, said as they took his judgment, "This is the word of the *beylik?* You speak his word, *Sidi?*"

"Yes," he repeated to them, "I speak the word of the *beylik.* Now, though, I am commander here, and it is my word you take."

WHEN the last of them was gone and the only sound was the creak and swish of the *pankah,* he lit a cigarette and stretched his legs. He had sweated during the hours of court. His britches clung close against his knees; the lining of his boots was sticky with sweat.

You've got to get up, he told himself, and go out and inspect their rotten little market and their dinky garden patches. One of them said his turnips weren't getting enough water from the *foggara*—that's the irrigation ditch—and that pregnant woman insisted somebody was stealing her carrots. How the hell did Segaix stand it?

Morbelot was more than halfway across the compound when he heard the radio. It gave a sudden roar of metallic sound from the small, detached building where it was housed. He turned, went to the building.

Voelkel and the shaven-headed Legion operator and about half a dozen of the Chaamba non-coms were inside, close to the machine. Voelkel stared at him over the heads of the others. "It is the general, Weygand, who speaks. From Morocco. You mind if we listen?"

"No." Morbelot gestured. "Keep silent, so that one can hear.

The voice was distinct through the intermittent growl of static. It brought to Borbelot that night of tragedy and near anarchy in Bordeaux when the men who called themselves the government of the French nation had decided to seek a Nazi peace. Weygand had talked to him shortly after dawn, Morbelot recalled. The general had told him

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to take his Senegalese riflemen back to Africa. Now the same voice said:

"Africa will be protected at all costs."

He strode from the radio room. Tears filled his eyes, and he didn't want the non-coms to see him weeping. Shadow was briefly cool upon his back, and he knew he was crossing under the archway and over the drawbridge. Village dogs ran between his legs, nearly tripping him. His head was raised; he was staring out into the desert, north toward the Hoggar and Morocco. Last night, he said in slow, mumbled words, Segaix had ridden north. . . .

That afternoon, that night Morbelot spent in a sort of fevered and profound sleep. His orderly awakened him, but Voelkel stood behind the orderly. "Thirty-four troopers deserted last night, Lieutenant," Voelkel said. "They took sixty camels with them, all their own property."

Morbelot lay still beneath the mosquito netting. "You're a strange type, Voelkel," he said. "Why don't you tell me straight that your idea is to disaffect this entire post, and get every fighting man to go join the de Gaullist troops? You know very well that I'm here as a loyal Frenchman to see that the orders of the present government are obeyed. But you don't believe in my authority any more than Segaix did."

"No, I don't," Voelkel said. "Me, I believe that lot at Bordeaux and Vichy sold out France. We're fighting men and we got arms. So why not fight? The Nazis will take Africa, or help the Italians to take it, if we don't."

"If we fight," Morbelot said, "the unoccupied zone at home will be seized. Tremendous hardships will be put on the people who are still relatively free. Many of them will be shot, or imprisoned."

"But yesterday Weygand said that Africa will be protected at all cost. You heard him say it. Come on, Lieutenant. Let's go take a crack at the Italians. The British are chasing them all across the North coast from Sidi Barrâni to Tripoli. Wouldn't you rather get a sock at the guys who helped hamstring France than sit here at El Gouar and watch the Chaambi grow carrots?"

"Yes," Morbelot said. He spoke sharply, and fast. "But I'm not a traitor, and before I did anything like that I would have to get explicit orders from my colonel at Timbuktu."

"Timbuktu went off the air early last night," Voelkel said. "The operator hasn't been able to raise them since. Maybe the de Gaullist boys took over there. But a guy just came in who you should meet, Lieutenant. He's very eager to see you."

MORBELOT got out from under the folds of the mosquito netting. He moved quickly to take his pistol from the table. But Voelkel stood smiling at him.

"The guy's English," Voelkel said. "A young officer from one of the South African regiments. Don't get tough, Lieutenant. He won't bother you. He's on his way north to fight the Italians, and he only stopped by here to find Segaix."

"Why Segaix?"

"Because Segaix is the best guide and tracker in the Big Sahara, and the Englishman is headed for Mouzrouk."

Morbelot put down the pistol. He ran his hands over his sweaty face and cursed. "I should shoot you," he said, "and shoot the Englishman for attempting to disaffect my post. But tell him to wait until I'm dressed and I'll see him."

The Englishman's name was Younsley, he said and grinned as he and Morbelot shook hands. He wore frayed shorts and a big sun helmet with a bullet hole through the crown. "Quite a bit of fun down south," he told Morbelot. "We've got the Ethiopians back to fighting their 'conquerors', and the Italians are running like rabbits."

Morbelot experienced an odd sense of chagrin. This blond, long-legged kid was proud of what he had done. His people, his country were still fighting, while France lay prostrate. "Sorry," he said to Younsley, "but I have no whiskey. Will brandy do?"

"Very fine," Younsley said. He stared at the glass, then at Morbelot. Are you going to ride north with us, Lieutenant, against Mouzrouk?"

"For what reason?" Morbelot said. He was angry now, and he let it enter his voice. "Your fleet bombarded ours at Mers-el-Kebir. Over a thousand Frenchmen were killed by English fire. Do you think I can ever forget them?"

"No, I don't," Younsley said. "Nor will I. But hating us for it won't do you any good. We're all going to be in the hands of the Nazis unless we fight. Nazi troops have landed in Africa, joined the Italian forces. And word we got on our radio down south before I left said the Nazis were getting ready to invade Bulgaria, outflank Greece. Time something was done, Lieutenant."

Morbelot heard the snarling cries of the camels on the picket line, and then the trumpeter blowing mess-call. Those camels were being saddled, he realized. That was why they snarled. He swung to face Younsley. "What will happen," he said, "if and when we take Mouzrouk?"

"That's the biggest Italian base in the central Libyan desert," Younsley said. "If we take that, we'll get supplies to go on and grab Ghadames and the other posts further north."

"A nice idea. But Mouzrouk is well over four hundred miles from here. The Italians have native scouts out along all the trails where there's waterholes."

"We won't use the trails," Younsley said. "We'll stay away from them and we'll ride by night. Then there won't be any chance of the Italians' scouts sighting us. I admit, naturally, that it's a very risky business. But a man like Segaix should take us through. You know Segaix, of course."

"Yes." Morbelot rubbed the knuckles of one hand with the palm of the other. "I've had the pleasure. Tell your men to report to the mess orderly and get fed, then we'll start."

"I've only six Hartanis I picked up in the south. Frankly, I'm counting on most of your force here as effectives for the job."

"Par exemple!" Morbelot said. "Most of my force are Senegalese riflemen. They're Ouloffs, from over near the coast, and not desert men. If they go north, it will have to be by automobile."

Lines drew at the corners of Younsley's mouth. "I noticed your cars as I came in," he said. "But we would be in a very bad fix if they broke down in the desert. Then your chaps would have to march on foot, and I doubt if we'd ever reach Mouzrouk. Segaix wouldn't like that, you know, having cars along on a hush-hush expedition."

"Segaix will like it," Morbelot said, his hands clenched, "or my outfit doesn't leave the post. Is that understood between us?"

"Yes, quite." Younsley was still scowling. "But some

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of my people, about a hundred camel troops, are supposed to meet us within ten days at Mouzrouk. If we don't meet them with all your blacks—and Segaix and his Chaambi—the whole thing will be a flop. So I hope there won't be any trouble between you and Segaix."

"Not much," Morbelot said. "The last time I saw him, I gave Segaix the whipping of his life."

SEGAIX had pitched his low, black leather *hockhoum* in a dip of an enormous volcanic slope of the Hoggar. All around the tent camels grazed the tufted grass. The men and the machines frightened the young camels, and Segaix had his Winchester across his knees as Voelkel came toward him.

"How are you, *Sidi?*" Voelkel said.

"All right. What do they do down there? The Chaambi and our Tuargi friends are on the crest; they'll blast the lot out of there with one volley."

"Morbelot and the blacks didn't come after you and the troopers, *Sidi.* A young English officer is with the party. He's a real fighter, and has been knocking hell out of the Italians over in Ethiopia. He wants that you join us in a raid on Mouzrouk. So does Morbelot."

The dark face was very hard; the big hands lightly balanced the Winchester. "I don't trust Morbelot."

"But you'll talk with the Englishman, *Sidi?*"

"Bring him up, and let the other dolt come, too."

Younsley talked for a long time, his maps spread before the tent. Segaix sat motionless, but his eyes followed each gesture the Englishman made on the map. "You'll go?"

"You ask a lot," Segaix said. "That's quite a ride, and doubly difficult if the trails and waterholes aren't used. But I'll take you, yes. I was with Charlet at the Combat at Esseyen. We—"

"You made that ride of eight hundred kilometers in ten days," Morbelot broke in nervously. "We've got just a week to make close to four hundred and meet Younsley's main force. My cars will do it, I'm sure, and we can carry enough fodder and water for the camels."

Segaix stared at him for a long moment in silence. "Every man should be able to take care of himself as an independent unit in the desert," he said. "Who has made any mention of taking your cars?"

"Please, gentlemen," Younsley said. "We need every man we can get to go to Mouzrouk. If the cars will carry some of them, then let's take the cars."

"There are plenty of camels here," Segaix said. "Let the blacks ride in the same style as my warriors. We will face the *bahri,* the winter wind, all the way. That will clog and stop the machinery of those junks. They will leave tracks the Senussi who ride for the Italians will find. This can be a fine trip, a real exploit of which the desert men will sing for generations to come. . . ."

His voice slowed, stopped. His desert-trained mind envisioned a firelit night where before the tents warriors sang of the great *sidi,* Segaix, and how he had come out of the waterless wastes to fall upon the Italians like a falcon upon sheep.

"We want no machines," he said. "We want camels, and men who can ride them, that's all."

Morbelot gave Voelkel a sidewise glance The square-set Austrian stepped closer to Segaix. "The Senegalese are good fighters, *Sidi,*" he said. "They're not fit to ride camels, and the cars carry machine guns. The guns would be big help to us at Mouzrouk."

"You, too, eh?" Segaix said. "You're on the side of Mister Reservist. I suppose you've also got hand grenades and flares, and the portable radio, Morbelot?"

"Yes, I have," Morbelot said, amazed at the older man's perspicacity. "We brought all those things from the post."

"Then we take the cars," Segaix said. "Get some sleep now, while my lads water the camels and prepare them for the march. We'll march by night, sleep by day. Return here at dusk for me. *Salaam aleikoum.* I seek sleep."

IV

THAT country where they rode the third night was called the *Reg Aftoute,* the Land of Thirst. It was shale rock and wind-eroded boulders, great, sharp canyons and then ragged peaks of old volcanic formation. The shale glinted in the starlight, and the camels took short strides without much sound. But the Ford cars labored and rattled, the speedbands whining in low gear, the solid rubber tires jarring down the slopes as the brakes pulled.

Segaix looked back from his vantage point at the head of the column and shouted. They were seventy-six men, one hundred and sixty camels and ten machines. So far, they had done well, kept real marching schedule, three hours on foot for the Chaambi and then seven hours in the saddle. But it was the cursed cars that made the trouble; they had left tracks the Senussi *choufs* had seen.

He put his hand on Bel Hadi's neck, quieting the beast's quivering. Bel Hadi smelled and sensed the Senussi; they were there to the north, riding in a fan-wise formation to cut off the column. Then he swung the camel and raised his hand in signal to Voelkel and Younsley.

"Senussi are ahead," he told them. "They've cut our tracks. We'll have to fight, and unless we beat them, we might as well head for El Gouar instead of Mouzrouk. If we leave one *chouf* alive, he'll ride to Mouzrouk with the news of our coming, and we'll be knocked off by the Italians like partridges."

"Where are the Senussi?" Younsley said.

Segaix pointed. "So we fight right here. They'll have to come up the gullies at us, and we'll hold this crest. If it goes right, we can charge down on them at the end. Take your positions as I order you. Voelkel, tell Morbelot I want his cars set behind the crest at twenty paces. He is not to fire until word from me."

Morbelot ran heavily breathing to Segaix. The Senussi in their gray-white robes were to be seen to the north now, dismounted and leading their animals carefully through the shadow of the gullies. "The *tirailleurs* are capable of stopping them down below," he said. "They're expert riflemen, and each of them has a sack of grenades."

"Return to your command," Segaix said flat-voiced. "You've got your orders. What the Senussi are after is our camels. We fight in the desert style, not like schoolboys."

Morbelot had the impulse to curse at him, or strike him in the face. But there was the rapping crack of a Mannlicher from below. The bullet carried with a whine past his head. He ducked, then turned back toward his command. A rapid volley was being fired by the Senussi.

He was quite worried during the hours of the fight. The camels were gathered closely in back of his line of cars. They were picketed kneeling, and some of the older Chaambi troopers guarded them. If the Senussi ever

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reached the camels, he knew, the whole expedition would be lost; they'd never get to Mouzrouk. Segaix wasn't only stubborn, he was a fool. A single bullet finished a camel. But to wreck a Ford a man must burn it.

THE Senussi came over the crest in short, scattered rushes. Their long *gandourahs* were pulled up into their belts for leg freedom, and when they rose to run they looked oddly like storks. Morbelot took care with his machine-gun bursts. He let the shots from the Hotchkiss he handled strike low, at the skinny, flashing legs. To stop a man, he had learned in France, was better than to try to kill him outright.

But there were a lot of the Senussi. They kept on crawling forward even after they were wounded. Now at least a hundred of them were over the crest. He glanced up from his sights as the Senegalese feeder ran in a fresh belt.

The machine guns on the other cars were all being well served. His men crouched inside the cars, or beneath, firing with their Lebels through the wheel spokes. Further to the right and left, the Chaambi were going forward to fight hand-to-hand.

Segaix led them. Younsley and Voelkel were with the big man. All three carried pistols and native knives. He could hear Segaix's voice, loud and yowling in a language he didn't understand. It must be Senussi, he thought. Segaix berated the Senussi as he killed them.

The Senussi were in retreat. Perhaps a score of them remained on the crest, and the rest slipped down toward the safety of the gullies. Chaamba troopers followed them, bue Segaix's trumpeter was sounding the recall. This was victory, victory for the arms of France.

Morbelot took his hands from the Hotchkiss grips. *"Li est bon,"* he told the Senegalese beside him. "I'm going to join the commander. Stay here, and don't fire any more."

Dead and dying Senussi sprawled where he walked. Once he came upon a wounded Chaamba who held his intestines in his hands. The man was in final agony, and there was nothing Morbelot could do for him. He went on, the smell of blood, sweat and powder thick in his nostrils.

Segaix stood alone in a rifle-pit dug behind a boulder, his big Ruby revolver hanging loose from the wrist lanyard. "All over?" Morbelot asked him.

"Not quite," Segaix said. He kept staring down into the gullies. "The English kid chased hot after the *choufs*. I'm afraid they've got him. It's an old trick of theirs to catch a man alone."

Men ran, wheeled and shot in a confused melée down in the broad depths of the gully directly below. Then there was one sheer shout of pain. It was made by Younsley, Morbelot recognized. He felt his stomach muscles contract, and sweat start along his neck. Younsley had been trapped and was being tortured.

"Take one of your cars," Segaix said, "and go down there and drive them out. Tell your gunner to start firing the instant he's started over the crest."

"I can't risk a car in such a place," Morbelot said. "It's too dark to drive without headlights. The driver would smash up on the boulders halfway down."

"Truly?" Segaix said. His teeth showed. "So you'd leave your ally to be carved into small souvenirs for the Senussi women. Get out of my way—stand back!"

BEL HADI was tethered to a low *thalla* bush about fifty yards away from the crest. Segaix ran back, swept the rope loose and with the same movement swung into the saddle. He hit hard with the riding stick to get Bel Hadi started fast. As the beast sprinted past the rifle-pit, he saw Morbelot. The man's face was a dull gray blur of surprise and doubt.

Bel Hadi leaped the boulders down below, checked stride with a lurching, sidewise movement. The slope was steep, steeper than he had reckoned, Segaix knew. But the Senussi weren't ready for him and Bel Hadi. Most of thm were getting out of there.

He fired the revolver until it was empty, then leaned from the saddle and struck with the butt. The Senussi struck back with their wide Libyan knives, and tried to grasp his ankles and fling him out of the saddle.

Bel Hadi trampled them, furiously screaming. They ran, those who could stand, and Segaix reloaded the revolver and shot them. "Quiet," Segaix murmured to Bel Hadi. "They're gone, my white one. None of them is a real fighting man."

He dismounted and sought for Younsley. A terrible gash had opened Youngsley's chest. It was from a knife blow, and the knife was still in the wound. Segaix took him in his arms and carried him up the slope. He walked slowly, for the boy was dying, and to walk slowly saved pain.

Morbelot and Voelkel were at the crest. He put the boy down and looked around for his mount. Bel Hadi was right behind him, the braided lead-rope dragging the shale. He took up the rope and whispered, "You did well, Bel Hadi."

Younsley lived for another half hour. He was conscious and made a good deal of sound. Segaix stood aside, letting Voelkel tend to the wound. It was too bad, he thought; the Englishman had been a brave and intelligent fighter. That thought slowly infuriated Segaix; it became his conviction that Morbelot was a coward.

"You might have saved him, Morbelot," he grunted. "But instead you stood and talked about your rotten automobile. What do you consider those things to be, flying carpets blessed by Allah?"

"I told you before," Morbelot siad, "why I thought it wrong to take a car into the gully. I refuse to repeat my reasons."

"You refuse," Segaix said. "But it was simply because of the track your cars left that the *choufs* found us. My outfit, the camels, left no sign for them. Go on back to El Gouar, coward, right away. If you refuse again at Mouzrouk, I'll shoot you. Come closer now and I'll spit in your face."

Morbelot took a stride, then stopped. It was all he could do to restrain himself from jumping at the older man. "You call me a coward," he said. "Me, Alain Morbelot, who lay in the ditches outside Dunkerque for five days and helped stop the Nazi *panzer* divisions with a few machine guns and hand grenades. You, you were out here in the depths of your Sahara, breeding camels and swigging rum. Don't talk to me again like this. I won't stand for it, hear me, you stupid Saharan savage? If you'd been needed in France, where the real fighting was done, they'd have sent for you. But they left you here, and they were right."

Segaix's breathing harshly rasped. His fingers caught clenched on his revolver stock. But Younsley was looking

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up at him, and Younsley said: "Not now, *Sidi*. Not until after you've taken Mouzrouk. You—you chaps have a job to do, and you promised to do it together."

Segaix lowered the revolver back into the holster. Younsley's body was arching, stiffening. The eyes that stared up at Segaix were calm in death.

"We march," Segaix said. "We go on, to Mouzrouk."

V

THE course that Segaix laid by his pocket compass and kept by the stars was east, northeast. That took them from the Erg d'Admer, where at night as they marched the rock and sand had a phosphorescent shine. To the south two mountains, Edjeleh and Tiska their names were, Segaix said, stood sharp as sword blades.

Camels began to sicken and die after the fifth day, for Segaix kept the column going at least seventy kilometers at a stretch. The Chaambi regretted the loss of the camels; the beasts had been of fine stock, and valuable. "France will buy you others," Segaix told the troopers when they spoke to him of their loss. "Remember that you are warriors born of warriors, and that you are here of your own spirit and will."

Great white eagles swung down closer to the column as the camels sickened. The sand swallows that had rested steadily on the camels' rumps were gone, and vultures followed the eagles. That was the way of the Sahara, Segaix thought; death brought further death.

He was savagely pleased to watch the way Morbelot handled the cars. The Fords were giving increasing trouble. They bogged in the deeper *ouadis*, turned over or slid back on the steeper slopes, and many times the Senegalese had to lift them bodily onto more level ground.

The Senegalese had first passed the hours of march idly counting the antelope and hyena and jackals that ran the far desert. They had been childlike in their curiosity of the Sahara. But now they were becoming scared: the gasoline and oil supply was low. Morbelot had used a great deal more than he had planned.

Thought of the Senegalese was always in Morbelot's brain. He liked the big black men; they had fought well for him in France. Still if his fuel supply became exhausted out here, he knew, they'd die, the whole lot of them. No man could make the rest of the march to Mouzrouk on foot, and all the camels were laden.

He thought more and more of Segaix. Since the night of the fight against the Senussi, he and Segaix had not joined in conversation. Recollection of Younsley's death and what had led to it lay starkly between them.

When it was necessary for Segaix to transmit a marching command or direction, he used Voelkel. The sergeant-major was curt; he quickly gave Segaix's words, then returned to his post with the camel outfit. In order of march, the camel-mounted men led, and then the machines struggled after in any fashion possible. It was only when more than a kilometer separated the two units that Segaix sent back Voelkel.

During the terrific white heat of the days, Morbelot had weird dreams of Segaix. He pitched from right to left as he tried to sleep under the tattered top of the Ford, his hands clutching. He was thirsty, he knew, very thirsty. But it wasn't water his dreams told him he wanted. It was some of Segaix's rum, the rum from the commissary at El Gouar. Life had been much simpler, easier back at the post, and here in the desert he felt completely lost.

The metal of the car burned his hands when he aroused and the march was continued. Even to hold the steering wheel was painful. The many hours of driving had made his arms, back and legs throb with pain. Each time the other machines stalled at a gully top, he was forced to go back and drive them separately ahead. The Senegalese were losing what little mechanical skill they had ever possessed. They were talking among themselves of the south, and of the great, cool rivers of their jungle in Senegal. Like him, they had come to hate and fear the Sahara.

TWO of the Senegalese went mad while camp was being struck the dusk of the sixth day. They fought each other with their terrible *coupe-coupe* knives. One was almost instantly killed. The remaining man sprang up into a car and grasped a hand-grenade sack. He threw grenades against three of the machines in turn, exploding them in chrome-brown bursts of flame. Then Morbelot shot him.

Morbelot stood holding the pistol in his hand for several minutes after the Senegalese had stumbled down dead. His system from the beginning had been to keep each car equally supplied with food, water, oil and gasoline so that the crew manning it would be self-sufficient if anything happened.

Now it had happened, and he had been wrong. This was vast and almost total disaster. The two dead men hed been very good soldiers. The one he had just shot had fought magnificently in the Dunkerque action. But the rest, twenty-eight men, must reach Mouzrouk in seven cars, and the added weight would probably wreck the springs and axles.

The pistol steel drew heat from the sun. He put it in the holster. Voelkel was walking toward him, through the crouched and numb-faced Senegalese. "Fireworks?" Voelkel said.

"Feu d'artifice, oui," Morbelot said. "I'm celebrating next year's Bastille Day." But then his voice took a ragged edge. "You needn't hang around and mock, Voelkel. Get on your way, you and the Chaambi and that old son of a goat who thinks he's master of the Sahara. I got my outfit in here, and I'll get them out. We don't need any help from you."

"Take it more easily," Voelkel said. "This is all one outfit—not two, the way you think. Maybe you got the idea it's been easy going for us. Like hell, it has. Some of those Chaambi can just about hang onto their camels. My knees are up somewhere in my ribs, and when I open my eyes wide, all I see is fire. Segaix is almost the same; I know it. The guy's over fifty years old. He's been working on his nerve ever since we pulled out from that scrap with the Senussi. Now, how can we help?"

"You can't help, really," Morbelot said. His words were slow, husky, nearly unintelligible. "I'll have to load all my men onto the remaining cars. That's going to put severe strain on the springs and axles. How's the country ahead?"

"Bad." Voelkel was pulling up his face-cloth to cover his mouth. "We're in the Erg de Mouzrouk now, and it will be broken, rocky country all the way to the fort. This is what the Chaambi call *'Sahara Boush'*—the Bitter Sahara. But do you want to talk to Segaix? Do you think he can help you?"

"No. My men will get the cars through, or we won't get through at all. Tell Segaix for me that if tonight's

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journey is seventy kilometers, we'll make it within two hours after he does—and no later. Understood?"

"Parfaitement," Voelkel said, and saluted him.

Segaix listened to Voelkel in silence. His legs were so swollen from saddle sores that he could hardly stand. While he had waited here for Voelkel to return, he had counted in his head the supplies left to his troopers. Each man had approximately a quart of water, for himself and the mount he rode. That meant that tomorrow's final march would be entirely dry. The column would arrive thirst-flamed to make the assault upon Mouzrouk. *Inch' Allah.* Such things were sometimes so in the desert. A man's life was never sure.

"We ride," he told Voelkel. "Give them the command to mount. The other, Morbelot, I think he'll get there, too. Fear of death will keep him moving."

VI

SEGAIX rode all night in a stupor of pain and fatigue. The shock of Bel Hadi's steps came through his spine to his brain. All of the other camels except Bel Hadi moaned with want of water. Some of the pack beasts were insane; they yanked whirling on the heavy lead-chains that held them in line.

But Segaix watched the stars and mused of Marseille. Nobody would recall him any more at home, he thought. If he died here in the Sahara, he would be forgotten. They in Marseille listened only for the banging of the Nazi boots. . . .

Then he lifted and he cursed aloud. He could hear behind the grind of speed bands and the frantic chattering of the worn Ford motors. That reservist had caught up to him again, was still with the column. If Morbelot got to Mouzrouk and joined with the English force and took the place, they'd know about it in France. Morbelot would be certain to send through news of his victory.

"You," Segaix said, muttering to Bel Hadi, "you take me to Mouzrouk or I'll slit your belly and drink the water from it. Emile Segaix deserves at least one more victory. Hear me, my camel, and hear me well."

Dawn was a yellow coruscation at the horizon as Morbelot brought the Fords up to where Segaix had pitched camp. The machine he drove had a cracked rear axle, and two of the others had broken springs. But they would get there, he told himself. He and the black men were going to reach Mouzrouk. This was a race now, between him and the old man, Segaix, but when it was over Mouzrouk would be easy. Nothing was any harder than this. . . .

The Chaambi gathered around Segaix in the dawn. He talked to them of the desert, and famous old desert fights. He told them of feats of arms which were so heroic they were legendary. His voice was like a chant, deliberate and modulated, then rapid and fierce, swelling, ringing. "Ours will be a victory like that," he said. "Tonight—this night—we will take Mouzrouk."

The thirst of the Senegalese was too great for sleep. They rose and stumbled to join the Chaambi, to listen to Segaix. Segaix did not seem to see them; he talked with his eyes shut, like a man held in a trance.

Alain Morbelot worked alone to fix the axle and the broken springs. His blistered hands slipped off the jack handle once, and he was nearly caught beneath the car, but after that he was all right, his motions sure.

He was able to hear Segaix's voice, although he could not understand the words. Segaix was desperate, he recognized. The man was trying to rally the Chaambi by a lot of old-fashioned harangue. But it was steel that would take the Senegalese fighting men to Mouzrouk, and steel that would take the fort.

He got up from repairing the axle and released the jack. Voelkel stood beside him. "You do a good job," Voelkel said. "I wouldn't be surprised to see you tonight at Mouzrouk."

"My only surprise," Morbelot said, "will be to see Segaix able to sit in the saddle when and if he reaches the place."

THEY rode side by side, in two parallel groups, that night, the camel-mounted men bunched together, and the machines with their fenders almost touching.

It was a race, and all of them knew it. Their fevered brains formed taunts, and the Chaambi yelled at the black men, waving their carbines. The Senegalese yelled back, and grimaced, their hands on the hafts of their big-bladed knives. "Mouzrouk," they said. "First!"

Silence came upon them when in the late starlight Segaix sighted a man with a camel who stood at the crest of a dune to the north. Segaix called to Voelkel, "Go forward and see who it is. He's not a Senussi or a Fezzani."

Voelkel came back galloping. "The guy's a Kounta, a scout from the English force that Younsley said would meet us here. They muster three hundred men, and they're got trucks and armored cars, a couple of one-pounders. But they're still about forty kilometeers away, over by Tabaniya. Their commander sent the Kounta out looking for us; thought we wouldn't make it."

Segaix put his hand up under the visor of his kepi. He touched his brow and felt the pulsation of the veins. Keep your head clear, he told himself. Think straight, Segaix. Then he said:

"We can't wait for them, the English. Our outfit must have water. You ride back with the Kounta to the English outfit. My compliments to the commander. We're going to make a try to take Mouzrouk, this outfit right here. If we don't, he can have the privilege. Inform him he should consolidate with us as fast as he can. Good luck. Ride fast."

Voelkel said a number of filthy words. His face became a grayish shade. "I can't be with you," he said, "at the taking of Mouzrouk?"

"Sorry," Segaix said. "But the men can't wait. They need water. They're going out of their heads for need of it. Look at them."

Voelkel looked at them. "Yes, *Sidi,"* he said. He kicked his camel around at the trot to join the scout.

The words Segaix planned for Morbelot were very clear in his mind. He pronounced them distinctly after he had ridden over to the car where the younger man sat. "We have made contact with our allies, the English. That was one of their scouts with whom Voelkel just went north. But the force is still several hours away from us, and several hours away from Mouzrouk.

"I propose to take the fort with the men of this group. You will obey every command I give, or the attack will be a failure and we will all die a slow and very bad death from thirst. Please make obvious to your men that the nearest water, and their only chance to get any, is inside Mouzrouk."

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Morbelot felt moved to shout with laughter. This swaying, haggard wreck of a man proposed to take the strongest fort in the Fezzan with less than a hundred other wrecks. It was mad. It was a mad and ghastly dream. Then he saw Segaix's eyes. They were very steady, keen.

"You took command of the expedition in the Hoggar," he said to Segaix. "I will obey you, and see that my men obey you. But you're sure the risk is necessary, and that we can't wait for the English?"

"Do you think," Segaix said, "that any of us can last another ten or twelve hours without water?"

"No."

"Then," Segaix said, "we attack. Bring your cars out on the right and left, to protect the flanks."

MOUZROUK was swaying date palms, a flag on a tall pole and thick white walls. Men saw them from the *mirador* tower, and they were fired upon as soon as they were within range. "Three-inch stuff," Segaix told Morbelot, signaling him to stop the cars in the last deep gully. "Good guns, but bad gunners. Let's go up on foot and take a look at the approach."

They hunched over the sand, pulling on their elbows. Machine-gun bullets kicked and cracked around them. "Close enough," Segaix said through his black, chapped lips. "We want water, not a slug in the head. *Voyons* . . . They've got barb-wire all around the place. We'll have a time with that with the camels."

Alain Morbelot was breathing hard. His chest hurt him, and his blinking eyes burned. "Why go in with the camels?" he said. "They'd never get through the wire; the machine guns would stop them for sure. But I can get through, at least as far as the outer wall."

"By chance," Segaix said, "just by chance, are you hoping to prove to me how brave you are? Cut it out, sonny. I learned about you, back when we had the fight with the Senussi. Leave desert fighting to desert men. The Chaambi aren't afraid to die. I'll take them to the wire so fast the Italians won't be able to pick off more than half a dozen. Then we'll hop in and get over the wall. Keep all your heroic talk until you're back in France."

"I don't think," Morbelot said, keeping his body very still, "that talk counts any more now. What does is France. If we take this place, that's one more blow for France's freedom. I suggest a very simple military maneuver. I learned it from the Nazi *panzer* troops. Do you want me to explain it to you?"

"Go ahead!"

"There's about a hundred grenades back in the cars. They can all be put in one car. Then I'll take the car and run it right up into the wire, pull a grenade pin and explode the lot. That should blow a hole wide enough for your outfit riding four abreast."

"Vache," Segaix said. "That, for example, is a very good idea. But won't you get blown to hell when you blow the grenades?"

Morbelot smiled. He was already crawling backward, into the gully. "Does it matter?" he said.

He piled the grenades loose on the floorboards in the rear of the car. Then he put one inside his shirt where he could swiftly reach it and started the car. While the wheels caught he leaned out to take Segaix's hand. "See you inside the wall," he said.

"Right," Segaix said. He stood stooped, and his face was very pale. "See you inside."

THE Ford couldn't go very fast, perhaps twenty-five miles an hour. Alain Morbelot had no way of telling; the speedometer had failed somewhere back south of the Hoggar. He bent low over the steering wheel and pulled the gas lever down to the bottom notch of the brass quadrant.

Bullets were hitting the radiator, the hood and the windshield frame. Some passed very close to his head. They were Breda machine-gun bullets, he told himself, and Mannlicher rifle stuff. He was lucky that bunch inside the wall didn't have an anti-tank gun, or some field piece they could deflect down on him. But now he was too near. He was getting right up before the wire.

The first strands of wire broke under the solid rubber tires, but the second and third snarled the hub caps, slung clanging up over the hood. Now, Morbelot thought, is your moment. You get out of here and you get a drink, or you die.

He pulled the grenade from his shirt and withdrew the pin, dropped the bomb back among the others in the rear of the car. Then he kicked the door handle with his foot, went sprawling out onto the sand through the wire.

He crawled a dozen paces, and a dozen more. Metal flicked his arm, but he wasn't sure whether it was a bullet or a wire barb. Then at his back there was the rush and smash of explosion. The car, he dully thought. There it goes. . . .

SEGAIX talked to the Chaambi and the Senegalese at the edge of the gully. He told the Chaambi they were to follow him, and to keep on following him until they were dead. For the benefit of the Senegalese he indicated the smoky hole where the Ford had been in the barb-wire.

"Your *sidi* did that," he said. "I think he's still alive. Let's go and get him. *Tirailleurs, si tu as soif, y a de bohne eau, là-bas.* We'll all have a drink, over the wall."

Bel Hadi vaulted the crater. He saw Morbelot, and that Morbelot staggered partly upright. He yelled to Morbelot, *"Vive la France!"* Then he took the silver-marked rifle out of the saddle boot and got ready to jump the wall. If the Italians had not got him now, he knew, they would never get him.

He went over the wall with the Chaambi and Senegalese beside him. The Africans had dropped their carbines and rifles; they wanted to meet their enemy with the knife. *"Vive la France!"* he yelled again, so Morbelot could hear it.

Segaix found small pleasure in killing. That had gone for him when he had passed Morbelot and come over the wall. He called hoarsely to the Italian with the most gold braid. "Surrender," he told the officer. "The English are coming, too, from Tabaniya, and your luck is out."

The Italian made him an abrupt bow and dropped his pistol, then his sword. "We surrender," he said. "We who have gallantly served our great—"

"Enough," Sagaix said.

He found Morbelot leaning up against the main gate. "You all right?" he asked Morbelot.

"I've got a bullet through the arm," Morbelot said. "But I'm all right."

"Fine," Segaix said, supporting him. "Some of these dudes must have champagne. We can drink to France."

"How about," Morbelot said, "a toast to each other?"

"That also appeals to me," Segaix said. "Come on inside."

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Warhead

The tin fish was ready, aimed at the sub

By Richard Sale

Author of "QRR," "In Action," etc.

This would have been simply an ocean holiday on the blue Caribbean—if the tools of war had not been there, and if it had not been for the stirrings of a warrior's memory

AFTER he reached the paradise that was the Bahamas, Bill got about so beautifully on the artificial leg that strangers did not even know he was missing his right. He acted as if he had a stiff leg there, nothing more. He couldn't swim, of course. But he could fish.

His father, now dead, had had a fishing cruiser at Wellington, the Brookfield estate on Great Abaco Island in the Bahamas. It had been in covered storage for four years, but it was sound as a dollar. One of his first official acts as master of Wellington was to order the refitting of the *Cardiff*. The boat had been named after the cruiser *Cardiff* which led the defeated German fleet into Rosyth in November, 1918, with Lord William Brookfield, Bill's uncle, aboard her.

Oddly enough, she was not a British-built boat, but rather an American type, and not more than eight years old. She was sixty feet long, but there was nothing of the luxury of these glorified cabin cruisers anywhere aboard her.

She had a forward cabin, sleeping four, with no frills, a minute galley, toilet, and the rest of her was a deck-house without an aft enclosure and a twenty-foot cockpit.

Out in that reach of sunlit cockpit, you felt that you were in the sea itself. And when she turned up her top speed of thirty knots, she left a swift boiling white wake with little swell behind, for she planed.

Bill loved her with that strange natural love that most Englishmen have for boats and the sea. His eyes took on a new brightness, a glow that they had not shown for two months, and his face lost its gauntness when he stepped into her, and he actually smiled when he handled her controls.

Marion got seasick on the first jaunt outside, but she hid it grimly and swore that she would grin and bear it rather than have her husband give up his new experience. The war seemed far, far away when Bill went to sea to catch a fish.

She knew that he slept at night, too, without muttering and turning restlessly, and looking terrible when he awoke at dawn.

Bill hired a skipper promptly, a British-accented Negro named Cap'n Jigger Jones, who was a philosopher and whose grand manners would have shamed the refinement of a Russian count.

Cap'n Jigger knew the islands. "Sah," he said. "I've fished from 'ere to there to Florida and to Cuba, and I do declare, sah, that most fish in this sea're on speaking terms with Jigger Jones."

"Good," Bill said, smiling. "Then you must arrange

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to introduce me to some of your acquantances, Captain Jigger, for I'm positively champing at the bit to set my hook in the jaw of a five-hundred-pound marlin. A man must feel he's accomplished something if he can land a fish like that."

"Well now, sah," said Cap'n Jigger thoughtfully, "I wish it understood at the beginning, sah, that among my acquaintances, there doesn't 'appen to be a marlin weighing five 'undred pounds for you to sink your 'ook into. But if you're willing to give me a try, sah—"

"My dear captain," said Bill, "the post is yours. You may consider yourself master of the *Cardiff* from this day forward. And I only ask that you take my wife and myself to the proper fishing grounds. The rest we'll leave to luck."

"Luck, luck," said Cap'n Jigger Jones. "The world is run by luck. The greatest victories, the worst defeats, each 'as their element of luck. I am a philosopher, sah."

"So I see," said Bill, his face clouded a little. "And you do not believe then that an individual like myself is responsible for defeat or victory?"

"Yes, and no, sah. A man needs courage and 'e needs pluck but most of all, 'e needs luck, and none of it 'ard. For a chappy may 'ave all the pluck and all the courage there need be, but the luck turns 'ard and 'e loses the race. Ah, luck, it's a subtle, subtle thing, it's always on the side of the man who wins. But luck alone is no good. With luck, you've got to 'ave the wit and courage to use it rightly. Begging your pardon again, sah, but I am a philosopher."

THEY went off-shore for the weeks that followed, and the luck was marvelous. They caught all kinds of fish. Even Marion, finally getting her sea legs and losing the queasiness, hooked into a barracuda which gave her the liveliest twenty minutes of her life.

They were wonderful days. Bill hadn't forgotten the war, but he no longer brooded about it. It was still real, his heart was still on the North Sea, but he was no longer plagued by bitter self-condemnation.

At least not until the day when the German U-boat rose to the surface, two miles due east of Mako Key and torpedoed a two-thousand-ton British tramp with meat for the Isles. The destroyer *Sardonyx* brought in some of the survivors, and the U. S. S. *Tuscaloosa,* a cruiser out of San Juan, brought in the rest.

After that, Bill no longer enjoyed his fishing. His eyes would sweep the surface of the sea each day they went off. And he kept wanting to go off further and further. Also, he now carried a heavy thirty-caliber rifle in the boat.

Marion knew what was in his mind, that vague, urgent, desperate feeling that he wanted to *do* something about it, something solid, concrete, something not so futile as being shot down over Flanders and losing a leg.

But Cap'n Jigger didn't know what Bill was thinking, and he began to worry. "Look 'ere, sah," he said one day, "this is a mighty small craft when you look at the size of the sea. Do you know that we 'ave been going off as far as one hundred miles due east at times?"

"We've two motors and radio-telephone," Bill said curtly.

"Yes, sah, but if a fire should break out, the telephone and the motors would not be much 'elp. I am a philohsopher, sah, but life is sweet. I am not a cynic. And one would think that you intend to go fishing for some monstrous fish which does not exist. These grappling 'ooks you've put aboard are big enough to catch a whale. Or I should say, for a whale to catch us.

"One would think that you, sah, were planning to grapple on the bottom for a submarine. But if you found one, might I point out that it could pull us to Kingdom Come, and failing that, by using its three-inch gun, it could, with facility, blow us to 'ell? I am a philosopher, sah."

"Captain Jigger, leave Mr. Brookfield alone," Marion said sharply. "He knows what he is doing."

But he didn't know. He was groping, planning childish things, dreaming of victory at night, and awakening to the reality of daylight which put the struggle in a different hemisphere—indeed, in a different world. And what, after all, could a man do with a boat, a captain and an adoring wife? The game was done; he was out of it. He wished he could keep his mind out of it.

"Sweep the cobwebs out of your mind," Dr. Westcott had said in London. But that had not been easy.

"Let's go on a picnic," said Marion, one day. "We could take the boat and go way off to one of the far islands of the Bahamas, Bill. I mean really far. Mariguana Island, two hundred miles southeast. Make it in one day, pitch camp, fish a day, and come home on the third. It would be a wonderful voyage."

"Yes," Bill said with sudden fire, "it would. But not Mariguana. I want to go to Mako Key, where that enemy action took place. Suppose we do that. You make the arrangements, Captain Jigger. I leave it all to you."

THE weather was fine, the trades blowing in gently from the northeast, and aboard the *Cardiff* they lazed their way southeast through the islands, at seventeen knots, watching the lands come up out of the sea, watching the white clouds scurry and then float across the backdrop of the sky.

And still the eyes of Bill Brookfield stayed dark. He was absent from the voyage in spirit. He was strangely preoccupied. He did not wish to fish at all, nor did he even show undue interest when Marion hooked, played and landed a one-hundred-fifty-pound white marlin, a fish he had never caught himself.

When they sighted Mako Key, as dusk was falling, they came around into its cove and let go the anchor. Using the dinghy, they rowed supplies ashore. Captain Jigger built a fire and cooked the dinner.

Mako Key was little more than a sand spit. It boasted no trees, and its only irregularity of contour lay in the hills of sand which the sea and wind had raised. Bill and Marion watched the fire for a bit as the day faded.

Then Marion said, "Let's take a turn around the shoreline until Jigger finishes the cooking, darling."

"Good idea," said Bill. He did not want to go, but he could not refuse her. They got up, and hand in hand they strode off across the sands, keeping close to the shoreline where the surf had wetted the sand and made it firmer for footing.

It was getting dark. Before they had returned, the night came down, and Bill snapped his flashlight on. They went along without saying much. They could see the glow of Jigger's fire as they were nearing it. The flames were hid from them by a ridge of sand.

Bill suddenly stopped and turned off the flashlight. Marion could feel the muscles in his hand tighten.

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They stood stockstill. "Bill," she whispered, "what is it?"

"A man, I think," he replied quietly. "He may be dead."

"Where?"

"Right ahead of us here. Saw him in the flash of this light. At least, it looked like a man. Very white, long, his legs still in the sea, rest of him stretched out on the sand."

She shivered. He could feel the tremor, close to her. He said, "Don't look, my dear. Turn your head away. It may not be pleasant."

"No," she said. "Turn on the light and see. Hurry. He may be alive. He may need help."

Bill turned on the light and spotted the smooth long figure. They both stared. Against the white sand, it was deceptive. They did not move. Next instant, Marion said sharply, "It's not a man."

"I see that," said Bill grimly. "A dead fish, do you think? Stay here. I'm going to have a—good Lord, darling!"

"What, Bill?" Her voice was wavering uncertainly.

"It's a warhead! *It's a torpedo!*"

THEY were both running until they reached it. They stood in amazement as he bracketed it in the light. They felt a little silly that they should not have recognized it before, but from a distance, in the darkness, against the sand, it had fooled them. They knelt beside it, wonderingly. It seemed so strange to see it there.

"Don't touch the nose," Bill said. "The detonator is located up there, and it goes off by pressure on the firing pin in the nose. I don't think you could exert enough pressure to fire it, but let's be careful and make no mistake. This is amazing "

She looked at him. His eyes were blazing with sudden life. He went over the projectile with the utmost caution, playing the light on it from head to rudder. Its nose was bright red. Its body was silvery. On the side of it was a scrawled message in rough black paint, the jest of some sailor: *Gott strafe England!*

"German torpedo," said Bill. "Twenty-one-inch warhead. This is something out of a fairy tale. To think that we should have found it way out here on this spit. It's fantastic, and it's wonderful. Now, how the devil . . . "

Marion touched its metal skin and then shrank from it. "But how could a German torpedo be here?" she asked.

Over the ridge where the fire burned the night red, Jigger Jones was calling: "Dinner, sah, rare steak with onions and corn on the cob! Man shall not live by bread alone, but when 'e shall, may it taste as good as Jigger Jones can cook."

"Be right there," Bill called. "Hold everything, Captain." He knelt down beside the torpedo again. "Darling, listen to me. I think I have it. You see the furrow of sand this thing lies in, and how the sand is bunched at its head? This torpedo was fired at a ship by a German submarine.

"It's possible that when the U-boat sank the tramp and the *Sardonyx* arrived on the spot, the U-boat was still lurking around and took a shot at the destroyer. Apparently, since the torpedo missed, the jacks never even knew they had been aimed at. The torpedo—it has a range of six miles—missed them and kept on going and beached itself here. That sinking took place only two miles due north east of Mako Key. You remember that? The whole action was just off here."

"Yes," Marion whispered. "Then you mean, this torpedo is still dangerous?"

"Not only dangerous," said Bill evenly, "but if I'm right in a guess, it is still maneuverable. It still has compressed air in it to operate the screw. Look here, the monster turned on its side here and the air-release is forced up, shutting off the servomotor inside. If I were to put this torpedo in the sea and force back the air release lever, the screws would function again. The sucking valve is still closed."

"Come and get it, sah!" Jigger Jones called.

"Let's go eat," said Bill Brookfield, his eyes filled with fire, a strange pleasant smile on his face. "Do let's go eat. And don't tell Jigger yet. I want to think about it a little."

"What will you do with it?" she asked. "Doesn't it weigh a good deal?"

"It's very heavy," he said. "But it can be hoisted with block and tackle. We have the equipment on the boat to handle two tons, so it will handle this thing. I suppose we'll take it back to Nassau and turn it over to the naval authorities there. That's the proper thing."

"Yes," she said uneasily, as they sat down to eat. She did not know what was in his mind, but she had the strongest premonition that he had no intention whatever of taking the torpedo back to Nassau.

THEY sailed in the morning, but they took the torpedo with them. First, at dawn, Bill and Cap'n Jigger had brought block and tackle ashore and raised the warhead.

They waited until the tide was high and they brought the *Cardiff* in to the beach, stern first. She was not a displacement boat, and she did not draw much water so that she came in very far before the guards over her propellers touched sand.

Then the stern was let down. Any good fishing boat has either a removable transom or a collapsible one, the back of which is fitted with rollers. The idea being, that when a heavy fish is caught and gaffed, you have only to lower the transom, get the fish's tail on the rollers and then pull him aboard over the rollers into the cockpit.

Once they had the torpedo on the rollers, they used the block and tackle aboard the boat and hauled the tin fish up. It was very long. Bill did not pull it all the way into the cockpit, as he could have. He left the head of the torpedo on the rollers, with the transom stern still down, and he braced the thing to both the stern cleats with manila so that it would not roll out of line with the motion of the boat. The rudder was roped to the towing bitt in the center of the cockpit, and then the torpedo was fixed.

"Darling," Marion said anxiously, "we're not going to sail with the back of the boat lying down like that, are we?"

"We are," Bill said. "It's perfectly safe, Marion. The *Cardiff* is an excellent sea boat, and you know yourself that the weather would have to be simply vile for us to take a wash aboard. Besides the cockpit is self-bailing, so it wouldn't make any difference. But seas won't come aboard. We'd have to be in a following sea with breaking crests to get into any sort of trouble, and we could always haul the torpedo back and close the transom if necessary."

"Then why not do that?" she asked.

"Because the torpedo is in a position to be fired instantly," he said, his voice grim. "And I mean to keep it that way."

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"Look 'ere, sah," said Captain Jigger Jones, "you are making a warship out of a pleasure craft, and I only signed on for a pleasure-craft working, sah."

"Then you can sign off right here," said Bill coldly, "if you wish. I imagine it might be lonesome. But if you wish to return to Wellington with us, you may leave the boat there."

"I stated no such intention, sah," said Captain Jigger. "I only wished to go on record as noting the fact that we are an auxiliary warship of His Majesty's naval forces, and I was wondering about my rank."

"Your rank?" said Bill Brookfield with a slow smile. "Quite right, Jigger. I have no authority, but under the circumstances, at least until we reach Wellington, suppose we assume that you are Lieutenant-commander Jones of H. M. *Cardiff?*"

"Not an admiral, sah?"

"Not an admiral, Jigger."

"Quite, sah. A lieutenant-commander then. I am a philosopher, as you know. Shall I sail for 'ome, sah?"

"No," said Bill grimly. "Just sail. Follow the course I've laid out for you on the chart table. I worked on it last night."

"Very good, sah," said Lieutenant-commander Jigger Jones and went forward to the helm.

"BILL," Marion said, worried, as the boat was eased off the screw-guards and picked up speed, heading northeast, "what are you thinking of? This is perfect madness. I came off with you on a picnic, a little voyage, and we found a torpedo. All right, darling, but don't get odd ideas. You act so strangely, you make me worry about you so. We've got to go home. We're a long way from Wellington, and we haven't food for an extended cruise, nor water either."

"We are going home," said Bill. "But we are going home in a circle route, skirting the eastern edges of the islands."

"But what for?" she said. "Are you still trying to win the war, darling? Can't you forget all that? You did your bit, you're out of it, Please, please!" She burst out crying suddenly.

He held her tight and comforted her. "But I haven't lost my mind, Marion, and I'm not acting as oddly as you'd think. Last night, I stood by the short-wave receiver on our radio-telephone and I covered the six-hundred-meter band, listening. You see, when a raider—whether it be submarine or pocket battleship like the *Spee*—gets a victim once, it isn't satisfied. It wants more. And we can't assume that the U-boat which fired that torpedo has left these waters."

"Why not?"

"Look at the charts, Marion, look at the charts. Not a ship leaves for England these days without first going to Halifax, N. S., and joining up with a protected convoy there. Now look here. Think of all the ships—our ships—that are coming up from South America loaded with beef for London. The oil from Trinidad and Curacao. Every one of those ships passes the lanes here en route to Halifax. And the submarine is waiting for another unwary victim. Right in here somewhere. Lying on the bottom by day, no doubt, and coming up at dusk to recharge the batteries. I know it's here."

"How do you know?"

"Last night on the air I heard an exchange of coded messages, very brief. Unsigned messages, which are illegal. Code I couldn't possibly attempt to break. I took a bearing on both the signals. One was northeast of us. The other was weaker and due east of Mako Key."

"Well?"

"One was the submarine and the other was its tender somewhere out in the eastern Atlantic."

"You can't be sure. It's a guess."

"But I am sure because I also heard an exchange last night between the British armed auxiliary cruiser *Rajah* and the U. S. S. *New Orleans,* a little north of Puerto Rico."

"What does that mean?"

"It means the *Rajah* is bound for Halifax and was intercepted by the American ship which challenged her identity. It was after this that I heard the submarine. Unfortunately, the *Rajah* had to break radio silence, and it's possible the sub is lying in wait for her to pass this way and lie open for torpedoing."

"And out of all this ocean, you're going to try and find a submarine?"

"No," he replied, "I'm going to find the *Rajah,* for I know her approximate course, and I have worked out her position for this morning. If I'm right, she isn't more than thirty miles away."

BILL BROOKFIELD was right, as it turned out. But it was Lt.-commander Jigger Jones who sighted the *Rajah* on the horizon in the northeast. "Make for it," Bill said sharply. "Full speed ahead. I'll tell you when to veer off. I don't want to get too close."

He handed binoculars to Marion, and went below. It was ten A. M. He went to a locker and found the white ensign which is flown only by ships of war and the royal yacht squadron. He came out again and bent it onto a halyard and then raised it to the peak of the mast where it broke out, clean and shiny in the morning sunlight, and then stood out stiff as the wind froze it.

He went below again and got his rifle, took the long knife from the fishbox and hooked it into his belt. He went about things calmly and quietly.

He had barely laid these things out when he heard a faint roll of thunder in the distance.

"Bill!" Marion cried.

He went topside, his face pale, his eyes shining. "Yes, darling?"

"Something is wrong!" she said sharply. "I can see the gun on the stern of the *Rajah!* It's firing!"

He stepped up into the deckhouse. "Jigger," he said, "full speed, every knot she has. Make for that merchantman."

"Merchantman?" said Lt.-commander Jigger. "She's sporting a pair of cannon fore and aft, is she not, sah?"

"She is the armed merchantman *Rajah,"* Bill said. "Make for her!" He accepted the binoculars from Marion with a steady hand and looked through them. "She's turned east, running," he said. He watched. "The sub must be under the surface. She can't hope to catch her that way. The *Rajah* is slow, but the sub is slower underwater. She'll have to surface to pursue the ship. Hold her on, Jigger, hold her on. There's a spout! The *Rajah* is firing this way!"

"At us, sah?" said Lt.-commander Jigger Jones in horror.

"No, north of us. See the white spout where the shell burst? Make for it! There's our meat! Make for it, Jigger! Lock the throttles full on!"

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"I am making for it like all 'ell, sah," said Jigger excitedly. "And there she blows, sah!"

The submarine burst from the sea in a boiling cauldron of white water; and the water seemed still to be pouring from her when the hatches opened and the men started running to the gun. She was one of the new seven-hundred-forty-ton craft of the U-37 class, almost brand new, with one 3.5-inch gun in the bow, one anti-aircraft gun in the conning tower, and six torpedo tubes. Bill examined the conning tower. There was a big machine-gun —no, two of them fixed together—an AA gun. He wondered if it coud be brought to bear down.

The submarine was moving east in pursuit of the *Rajah*. Already the gun in the bow had spoken. It crashed thunderously and sharply, for they were coming up close to the U-boat now. The *Rajah* replied with its stern gun but missed the sub by three hundred yards.

BILL watched the sub from the deckhouse window, and suddenly saw a blinker signal going into action! *Stop ship, heave to ship, torpedo ship.* This wasn't going to the *Cardiff*. They woudn't waste a message on the *Cardiff*. They were signaling the *Rajah*.

But some one in the conning tower had spotted the *Cardiff* coming on at her full speed, breasting the flat sea at thirty three miles per hour.

An officer gesticulated wildly. The men at the gun in the bow began to swing it around to put a shot into the *Cardiff*, while the submarine continued to pursue her course after the *Rajah*, overtaking the merchantman slowly.

"Jigger," Bill said, "they're trying to put the 3.5 on us, but we're moving too fast. Keep swinging wide until you get in her blind spot astern and then come up on her stern fast."

Jigger did this. The *Cardiff* quickly moved into the blind spot, that angle behind the conning tower where the forward gun could not fire without hitting its own ship.

Bill leaped to the flashlight, and began to work it. *Heave to,* he signaled. *Heave to, cease firing or I will torpedo you.*

He let the searchlight go. Some one was swinging those machine guns around and bringing their muzzles down as the *Cardiff* moved in. The machine guns began to fire. But the spouts where the bullets hit were far behind them. Bill said, "Luck! We're under the trajectory!"

Nevertheless he took no chances. He grabbed the rifle and sighted on the gunner and fired once. The gunner disappeared and the machine guns went silent.

The sub was starting to swing around to bring her forward gun into action, but the *Cardiff* played with her, hanging in the blind spot. Eastward, the *Rajah* was getting away, growing smaller as she went.

Back to the searchlight, Bill signaled: *Last chance. Heave to and surrender. One minute.*

The sixty seconds took an eternity to pass. Bill watched the cockpit sharply. They were looking at him through binoculars and they could not see the warhead. They called his bluff. They started to submerge. The hatches were closed, the bow began to dip.

"Jigger," said Bill Brookfield evenly, "make for a point off her beam quickly and present your stern to her."

The *Cardiff* raced forward and reached the beam, about one hundred feet off the portside. Jigger turned the helm over, and the *Cardiff* turned west, presenting her stern to the target. When the boat was a hundred yards away, Bill used the knife on the ropes, and struck the air lever back. The angle of the boat, riding on her step, gave enough incline to start the torpedo. She slid in, her screws whirling. They could see her white wake as she streaked astern.

The explosion was ghastly. It blew them all off their feet. He had thought they were far enough off, but the concussion caught them. They were unhurt however.

They wheeled the *Cardiff* back. There was one survivor, miraculously unhurt. Then a slick spread out across the sea. The *Rajah* had disappeared, and she did not return. They waited there for other survivors, but there were none.

●

The Admiralty communique in London the following night mentioned that a German submarine had been sunk after an attack upon H. M. *Rajah* by the MTB *Cardiff* pressed into service.

Jigger Jones made the most of it. He was proud of the boat. He had been filling up his friends with the tale of the action anyhow. When he saw the newspapers with their stories on Sgt.-Pilot William Brookfield, late of the R.A.F., his chest nearly burst.

"Why, sah," he said to Bill, "I've been skippering a blooming 'ero and never even knew it. That wasn't fair of you, sah, indeed not."

"I'm very sorry," said Bill.

"And you lost your leg in air-fighting?" said Jigger Jones. "Do you know, sah, that you carry it very well. I 'ad not suspected to this very day, sah, that your right leg was not your own."

"Thank you, Jigger."

"But your good right leg," said Jigger sadly. "It must be a terrible 'andicap, sah, I do say."

"Not at all, Jigger," said Bill Brookfield with a smile. "For after all, you see, I, too, have become a philosopher."

Backache, Leg Pains May Be Danger Sign

Of Tired Kidneys—How To Get Happy Relief

If backache and leg pains are making you miserable, don't just complain and do nothing about them. Nature may be warning you that your kidneys need attention.

The kidneys are Nature's chief way of taking excess acids and poisonous waste out of the blood. They help most people pass about 3 pints a day.

If the 15 miles of kidney tubes and filters don't work well, poisonous waste matter stays in the blood. These poisons may start nagging backaches, rheumatic pains, leg pains, loss of pep and energy, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes, headaches and dizziness. Frequent or scanty passages with smarting and burning sometimes shows there is something wrong with your kidneys or bladder.

Don't wait! Ask your druggist for Doan's Pills, used successfully by millions for over 40 years. They give happy relief and will help the 15 miles of kidney tubes flush out poisonous waste from the blood. Get Doan's Pills. (Adv.)

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"Barstow," said Craig, "if another man of mine is attacked, I'm coming after you"

Northward Rails

By Frank Bunce

Start now this magnificent novel of the men who sweat blood to push our railroads through the Midwest wilderness

JUNE, 1855: the ferment of empire-building is stirring in the crude new settlement of Lakehead, Wisconsin. It's railroad fever: the dream of opening up great virgin stores of iron ore, timber, rich land—with a railroad that will feed whole new communities.

JEFFREY CRAIG, a Bostonian who has helped build railroads in the East and in the West, has come to Lakehead with this same dream and a plan for fulfilling it; but he arrives only to find his name a mark of distrust and hatred in the community.

MIKE SLANE, who has worked with Craig before and who summoned him to Lakehead, explains this hostility. The community has been promised a railroad, to be built by the People's Railway Corporation—an outfit, Slane says, whose sole purpose is getting control of the state and its resources.

At the corporation's head is WILLIAM BARSTOW, whom Craig remembers as a ruthless exploiter of railroads. Fronting for him are LUKE GRANVILLE, Madison banker; and MILT WYCLIFFE, publisher of Lakehead's paper and brother of the late Judge David Wycliffe, whose memory is highly respected in the community.

But Mike Slane—raw, uncouth, an expert at rough-and-tumble—has taken a hand. Having won (through a rigged poker game) a seat in the Wisconsin state senate, he has chartered a railroad with Craig as president and chief engineer. It parallels a line chartered to Barstow's company, starting at Junction City, eighty miles south of Lakehead and terminating at any point on the shore of Lake Superior, three hundred and fifty miles north. With it goes a chance at the biggest land grant in the history of the Northwest.

And herein lies the reason for the town's hostility toward Jeffrey Craig. "A railroad is a life an' death matter to these people," Slane tells him. "An' they think you're out to bleed their road to death."

TOGETHER Craig and Slane go to the community railroad meeting in the courthouse square. Settlers are there from all the surrounding country, eager to be told the plans. But Barstow keeps in the background and Luke Granville addresses the crowd, telling them that plans have fallen through: the Eastern crowd financing the venture has insisted on a monopoly.

This story began in last week's Argosy

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But they can still have their railroad, Granville tells them, if they themselves finance it—mortgaging their farms and possessions for the necessary credit. He assures them that they will get everything back when the road is built.

At first the crowd is distrustful; then suddenly ANN WYCLIFFE, Milt's niece, stampedes the rest by pledging the property left by her father, the late Judge Wycliffe. Craig leaps to the platform, shouting that Barstow's plan is a swindle; but as soon as his name becomes known the crowd threatens to mob him—and Ann, who had looked on him admiringly at first, turns away with scorn.

Craig and Slane escape the crowd, but Slane is discouraged about their own project. However, he tells Craig that if he insists on going ahead, there is one man whom he must meet: young Tom Durstine, who surveyed the right of way for Craig's road. . . .

CHAPTER VII

JOHN Q. CITIZEN

THE settler, Ely Nathan, who had guarded Craig's and Slane's rear, was just turning back into the crowd when Granville resumed speaking. He was suggesting that committees of three members from the larger communities, one each from the smaller, be chosen to supervise the signing of the mortgages, the issuance of stock certificates.

Nothing could have been better calculated to win favor with his audience and dispel any lingering doubts they may have entertained. The assembly promptly dissolved into a number of small caucuses that chose their committeemen by acclamation, and delegated them to confer with Granville in the jury room of the courthouse.

As the only man present from his own community of Black Creek, twenty-three miles up the Fox river, Ely nominated and approved himself, and went along. He would have to make a report on the meeting to his neighbors back home, and the responsibility weighed heavily upon him.

That settlement had been established for seven years now, and it had made some headway. Everyone had his three hundred and twenty acres of good bottom land, his house and barn of logs or whip-sawed lumber, his horse or ox team and cow and chickens and clearing.

But all of them realized that they had held these things only provisionally. They could have no security so long as they lived upon a frontier. The wilderness that encircled them had to be decisively beaten, driven back so far that a new frontier could be inserted between it and them.

A railroad would do that; and they were prepared to take risks to get it. But Ely wanted to make sure it was an intelligent risk, one that he could conscientiously ask his neighbors to share with him.

This attitude was shared by most of the others who followed Granville into the jury room and sat down with him at the long, rough-pine jury table or ranked themselves against the squared-log walls; even by such large landholders as the lion-headed lumbermen, Daniel Wells, and Swenson, Mann, Neil, and Billings, the sawmill men. Without a railroad, they too owned their lands only provisionally against the wilderness.

GRANVILLE had sent for Barstow, and in a few minutes a cheering commotion from outside signaled his approach. He came in, smiling, breathing hard as if he had hurried; and something vital and refreshing as clean, cold air entered the room with him.

"I've just heard, gentlemen, what you've decided to do," he said. "I needn't tell you how I feel about it. It's magnificent; it's such a project as could originate only with men of the West: a great utility built of the people, for the people."

Wells answered dryly: "Well, it's fine to know we're appreciated. But if you don't mind, we have a few questions to ask, and then we'll have to start home. Some of us have got a long ways to go."

He spoke with an ironical intonation that reflected the attitude of most of his fellows. They were tired of speeches by now; they wanted facts. Barstow perceived this, and instantly shifted ground.

"Ask any questions you like," he said. "But first let me show you some preliminary data that may anticipate most of them—save time."

He dipped into a carrying case for a sheaf of documents, which he passed around for their inspection. There were maps on which were traced several tentative routes for a railroad; and attached reports, over the signature of Steve Mitchell, the engineer, outlining the advantages and disadvantages of each. There was an intricate financial prospectus studded with formidable technical phrases, which Barstow glibly explained away.

The gist of the matter was, he said, that the railroad could be built in two years, at a minimum cost of about eight million dollars; of which a third, at least, could be recovered immediately upon its completion through the sale of the land grants, while the remainder could be quickly realized from revenues.

Some revenue would be derived from the sections finished first, even while the rest was being built; and once completed, the road as a whole would yield a net of some two or three million annually.

"That's a lot of money," said Neil, one of the sawmill men. "But eight million dollars—what we've got to have to build it—is a lot, too. It's more than we'll be able to raise."

"We shan't need that much," said Barstow. He had a magical voice; clear, forceful, yet subtly mesmeric. That voice had charmed untold millions from the pockets of investors.

"I don't want to be overly optimistic, but I am convinced that four or five millions will see us through. I hope to persuade the Wisconsin legislature to let us have some of our grant as soon as the first section of the road is completed, from Junction City to Lakehead; say, half a million acres. From that, together with the revenues from freight and passenger traffic, we should realize enough to build the rest of the way."

"What if the legislature refuses?" Wells asked. As a member of the lumber lobby, he knew and distrusted legislatures.

Barstow smiled easily. "Suppose you were a legislator with your job dependent on pleasing your constituency. Wouldn't you vote for a proposal endorsed by all the best and most influential people of your district?"

That did seem reasonable. But Wells had another question:

"How do we know the road will be completed in two years? How do we know it will be completed at all?"

"We don't," said Barstow. "We don't know the sun will rise tomorrow, either, but I'd like to bet on it. I'd like to bet the same sum I'm betting on this road."

"How much is that?" the blunt Wells asked.

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"Fifty thousand dollars." Barstow produced another document. "Here. See for yourself. That's my fee for financing and engineering the road, and if you'll read this contract you'll see that I don't get a penny until the job is done."

THERE was an impressed silence, while the contract was passed around and read. Then Saunders, a farmer from some prairie settlement south of town, questioned:

"What about this feller, Craig, and his railroad? He's got a charter, too, and he's already surveyed to the county line."

Barstow hesitated, and said finally: "I'll be frank with you. Craig's a problem. We all know he doesn't intend to build, but that charter gives him a certain nuisance value. But don't worry. We'll handle him."

"How?" Saunders persisted.

Barstow looked at Wells. "You're a logger; you must have trouble sometimes with men like him, who get in the river ahead of your drive, and don't want to move. What do you do about it?"

"I run through them," said Wells.

"Suppose they won't open for you?"

Wells' heels struck the floor sharply. "I run through them!"

Barstow looked at Saunders. "Does that answer you?"

"I guess so," Saunders said.

Barstow's voice rose a little. "I'll add something. We'll run through not only Craig, but through everyone and everything that gets in our way. There'll be dangers, difficulties, alarms—plenty of them. There may even be times when it will seem we're not going to make it. But we'll run through." He broke off; resumed, looking a little sheepish: "I'm sorry. I hadn't intended to be melodramatic. More questions?"

There were no more questions. There could be none, after that fine challenge to their instinct for adventure. Barstow held them only long enough to outline tersely the part they were to play in signing the mortgagors, distributing the railroad stock, then let them go. He never made the error of talking too much after he had made his point.

. . . Ely Nathan left with the others, and went directly to his one-horse rig. It was nearly dark, and the town wore an inviting golden night smile, but he did not linger. He could not afford whiskey or a room, or meals in town—yet.

He consoled himself, driving out the stub of plank road to the north, with the reflection that when the railroad came and the country filled up so that he would have a cash market for his crops, he would be able to live a little better.

Not splurge, mind you. He would never be one for splurging, no matter how much he had. But he could get a few of the nice things sometimes without worrying too much about whether the money wouldn't better go for something he needed worse.

In the cart was a fat little sack of sugar candy that had cost ten cents, but he had thought a long time before buying it, thinking that by rights he ought to put the money into flour; and he had had the same struggle before he bought the ribbon for Lena, his wife, and tobacco for himself. Well, once they had a railroad, he wouldn't always have to figure so close.

But with night closing in, and the wind taking on a slight edge—not cold, but coolish, for June—he began to feel depressed and anxious. It had been fine, hearing Barstow talk about running through dangers and difficulties, but suppose they didn't? Suppose this fellow, Craig, was right, and it was all a swindle?

The thought frightened him, and his reaction to his fright was prompt and characteristic. His hand reached out for the rifle leaned against his cart seat, and clutched it firmly.

CHAPTER VIII

GAME-RIGGER

AT ABOUT that same time, behind closed doors of the front corner room of the Wisconsin House, Granville was saying to Barstow:

"Bill, we're going to have trouble with this mortgage steal. Plenty of it. These people aren't going to give up their property without a fight."

Barstow sat at a center table laying down cards for a game of solitaire. He made seven piles, the first with one card in it, face up, the second with two cards, the last turned face up, and so on to the last pile, which had seven cards, the last card turned face up.

On his first run through the rump deck, he sifted out an ace, which he put to the top of the layout, on the next a red six, that he attached to a black seven at the bottom of the layout. Then he ran through the rump deck resultlessly, before he replied:

"Of course there'll be trouble. There always is, with any steal. If there weren't, more people would be thieves. Perhaps everybody would be."

"I don't mean the ordinary brand of trouble, Bill. Scandal, name calling, reform tickets. I'm talking about bullets, neck stretching. These people seem orderly enough, but they can get bad. They leave their guns in their rigs or at the livery barns; but they do have guns. And a lot of them carry ropes on their harness hames."

"I've never objected to a moderate amount of shooting, providing it wasn't all directed at me. And I'm superstitious about hanging. I feel that if I'd been destined to die with a rope around my neck, it would have happened long ago." Barstow looked up from a displeased survey of the layout, smiling faintly. "What's the matter, Luke? Scared?"

"Damned scared," said Granville. He poured himself a drink from a bottle on the table, and downed it quickly; and then, though not half of the fine, slim cigar he smoked was consumed, he took another from a silver box in front of Barstow, and held it absently in his hand.

"I was born scary, and I've never been able to get over it. I was scared stiff when that man Craig turned on me today, and he saw it. Brawling—blood, the sound of blows—makes me sick.

"I don't know why I keep on in an occupation like this, where I'm always being scared. I'm a rich man. I could quit now, and live like a king. And so could you. What makes us go on risking our necks?"

He noticed that Barstow had resumed play, and now had a dozen cards at the top of the layout, instead of only the ace he had found on his first run through the rump deck. He said, in mild astonishment: "Where did all those cards come from? I thought you were beaten."

GORE burst in—Black Jack Gore, Barstow's bodyguard. He looked excited. "I been trailin' Craig an' Slane, like you told me to," he said to Barstow. "They're down at the stage office, buyin' tickets. On the way back they

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got to pass a lumber lot that's dark. I could get both o' them from there, an' nobody'd ever be the wiser."

He watched Barstow's strong white hands running through the deck, flipping cards to the top of the layout or matching them to the bottom with incredible speed and deftness. He said, impressed: "Say, you're goin' to win again. You win 'most every time you play."

"I aim to," said Barstow. "Where are they bound for—Craig and Slane?"

"Craig's gettin' a ticket to Milwaukee, Slane to Madison." Gore frowned down at the layout, his slow brain struggling with an idea. "Say, you must cheat. Nobody could win as much as you do, playin' honest. That's good—cheatin' at solitaire—cheatin' yourself!"

He laughed uproariously; helped himself to a cigar. Barstow waited until he had it lighted and burning well, then struck it with the rump deck on its lighted end so swiftly and smartly that it disappeared entire into the mouth of the startled Gore. Simultaneously, Barstow had thrust a foot between the other's feet, hooking the toe behind one of Gore's heels, his own heel pressing against the ankle of Gore's other leg.

The man crashed to the floor and lay there a moment, retching horribly. When he arose, his face was black with fury, his streaming eyes murderous.

Barstow sat quite still, regarding him with eyes brilliant and expressionless as polished stone. There was something horrible about that stare, and Gore wilted under it. He began to whimper:

"Barstow, that was a hell of a thing to do. I won't be able to eat for a week."

"You'll eat." Barstow was calm and reasonable as if he were discussing something of only remote, impersonal interest. "You won't enjoy your food, but you'll get it down. When a man gets hungry enough, he can stand anything, to get his food down. . . . Have a chair, Jack. I want to explain something to you."

He was suspiciously soft-voiced, bland, and Gore looked distrustful accepting the chair he pushed forward. But Barstow went on, in the same reasonable tone: "I do cheat, Jack, but not myself. You see, I play this game for mental stakes, buying the deck for fifty-two dollars, allowing myself five dollars for every card that goes to the top of the layout.

"I play according to the rules until I'm stuck, and then total up my gains or losses, all according to the book—but I don't stop there. I rearrange a few cards in the rump deck, and go on playing. Thus, the game has a double fascination. I don't just sit and wonder what would happen if this card had been placed so, that card thus. I know."

He looked at Granville. "Perhaps there's the answer to your question of a few minutes ago. Perhaps it's nothing more than curiosity that keeps me playing a dangerous game, breaking rules, when, as you remarked, it is no longer necessary. It may be just the itch to see what will result from a certain combination of men and circumstances, manipulated by myself."

"It's not curiosity with me," said Granville.

"With you it's fear. The same instinctive fear that makes you eat every meal as if it were being paid for with your last dollar—or swipe another cigar out of my box when the one you have isn't half smoked."

Granville started, looked with real surprise at the cigar in his hand, dropped it back with guilty haste into the silver box. Barstow smiled sparsely, resuming: "You say you're rich enough now so that you wouldn't have to take chances, but you're not. You wouldn't be if you possessed half the wealth on earth. You'd be so afraid that you still didn't have enough that you'd risk it all to get the other half."

GORE had been listening with an utter lack of comprehension. He put in, grimacing from the pain of moving his singed mouth: "What about Craig and Slane? Shall I lay for 'em?"

"No," said Barstow. "Let them go. It looks as if Craig may be giving up and going back east."

"Suppose he isn't giving up? Suppose he's only going east to hunt capital for his road?" Granville asked.

"All the better. It's another player, in a game that we have rigged. And more than that, he's the one that will get credit for rigging it, when the showdown comes. We need somebody to stop those bullets you anticipate, Luke; some neck to stretch those ropes around."

Barstow swept the cards together with a single, deft movement; stood up smiling. "Let's run down to dinner. A good meal will put heart into you."

"I forgot to tell you," Granville said. "We're dining at the home of Milt Wycliffe's niece. I promised you'd come."

Barstow frowned in annoyance. "Can't you make some excuse for me? Insipid, home-cooked food: insipid, homey conversation—you know I don't care for them."

"The food won't be insipid. And neither is this girl. She's young and pretty, and you're a hero to her." Barstow looked at him with granite eyes, but his thin, high nostrils flared, pinched together suddenly; and Granville chuckled, familiar with this phenomenon: the only sign of feeling the man ever displayed. "That makes a difference, doesn't it, Bill?

"A decided difference," Barstow agreed, and went along with no more protest.

CHAPTER IX

COME SIT ON A POWDER KEG

CRAIG had awakened just at dusk, after sleeping less than three hours; but that brief rest had magically erased the fatigue of weeks. Observing his clear eye and healthy flush, Slane grunted an amazed tribute to his powers of recuperation. Most men, he knew, once in bed after such a trip as Craig's, would have stayed there for days.

On returning from the stage office, they found young Tom Durstine awaiting them. A recent product of an eastern engineering school, he was awed almost to speechlessness at meeting Craig.

"I've heard about you," he said. "Colonel Dorne, of the army engineers, lectured before our class last year, and told about your work at Hatchet Pass. He said he and his party had tried vainly for months to find an opening that would let a road over without crowding the 116-foot grade limit, until you joined them; but you found it within a week. They'd been following the lower, synclinal line, but you solved the problem by going higher, along the upper, anticlinal line. They'd never thought of that. He called it a stroke of genius."

"It was a stroke of luck," said Craig. "My horse ran away from a bear one day, and showed me that route. A running horse instinctively will pick the easiest way

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down. It's such things that make you wonder. That horse never looked through a transit, or studied engineering."

Durstine was in difficulties. The first ninety-mile section from Junction City to the Lakehead county line, he had negotiated easily enough. He had only to follow the rivers and the flat shore of Lake Winnebago. But now, facing uncharted country, his mind was a tangle of doubts and perplexities.

It was not wilderness he feared, but bad work. Up there, with a whole unsurveyed world before him, how could he ever be sure he had chosen the best route? How would he even know where to start his reconnaissance?

He had a sheaf of maps with him. Craig selected one that comprehended the whole state of Wisconsin and all of upper Michigan, and folded it so that the part representing southern Wisconsin up to the Lakehead county line was turned under. He put a pencil on it, said to Durstine:

"Close your eyes." The other complied, and he said: "Now take this pencil, and draw a line."

"What kind of a line?"

"Any kind—in any direction you want to. But keep your eyes closed."

Durstine's fingers closed around the pencil, and he pushed it straight up across the paper until the pencil ran off the map. Then he opened his eyes, looked at the line he had drawn.

"What's this supposed to be?" he asked.

"That's your reconnaissance. In unsurveyed, non-mountainous country, it's as good as any other." Craig grinned, seeing how the other's troubled face cleared instantly. "That helps, doesn't it? Now go ahead, and start your preliminary survey. I'll be back in ten days or so to help you.

"There's only one thing to bear in mind. Keep accurate survey records, and sleep on them, with a gun handy. Anybody could come along behind us, and substitute their stakes for ours; but it would do them no good so long as we had our survey records, to file with the Secretary of the Interior and the state railroad commission."

"I'll keep those records," Durstine said quietly. He was young, and the immensity of a wilderness that stretched northward to the Arctic tundra, west to the Pacific, could clog his brain; but there was stout stuff in him.

CRAIG left by stage next morning; and four days later he sat at lunch with his brother, Eben, in a Boston restaurant. No pair could better have exemplified the two widely variant types of men their tight-lipped land had given to the world.

Tall, spare, weatherbeaten, Jeff was the adventurer who sailed the sea-schooners all over the seven oceans, the land schooners across the Western plains; Eben, portly, spectacled, mild of voice and manner, was the New England stay-at-home, whose adventures were mostly of the mind.

At thirty-three Eben held the chair of political economy at his congenital college, and his poems and light essays were appearing with decorous infrequency in the approved literary publications of the day, but—a not unusual New England paradox—he was also a valued investment counsel for a Boston banking house.

The two were very fond of each other, but each was unable to understand that other's choice of a way of life. They talked of inconsequential things a while, and then Craig said:

"Eb, I've got to have some money, for a Wisconsin railroad. I should have five or ten mililons, but I can do with less for a starter. Say two or three hundred thousand."

"You're a most reasonable person, scaling down from five or ten millions to two or three hundred thousands in one breath," his brother said dryly. "I'm afraid, though, that you wouldn't be able to get a dollar for a Wisconsin railroad from any banking institution in the East. We've lost too much money on wildcat Western roads already; and Wisconsin, particularly, is a stench in the nostrils of all Easterners."

"The feeling is mutual," Craig assured him. "Eb, haven't I any money of my own lying around somewhere? I used to have some?"

"You had $28,625, which came to you from our Uncle Eph, at the age of eighteen. At nineteen, however, you had made away with some $28,000 of it, leaving just enough to take you west in the style to which you were accustomed."

Eben looked down at the palms of his hands, studying them as if they were the pages of a ledger. "At present your total assets are one lot on Summer Street, worth perhaps one thousand dollars, and a half interest in the home of your esteemed grandfather, Cap'n Ebenezer Craig, at Salem, which might fetch a fairly good price. Say $75,000."

"It never will, though," said Craig gloomily. "You own a half interest, too. And you don't believe in selling things."

Eben kept looking at his hands. "I'll sell. That's seventy-six thousand dollars for you. Now then, I have a little money of my own, in three accounts. One, started with the $28,625 which I inherited at the age of eighteen from Uncle Eph, has grown by natural increase to the sum of $37,826.33. Another, which represents fees for investment counsel, reinvested in the securities I recommended to others, totals $136,402.58. The third fund represents the earnings of a lifetime as a poet and light essayist, and amounts to $31.00. These funds, together with the $76,000 mentioned above, total about a quarter of a million dollars."

Craig was staring at him unbelievingly. "Are you saying you'll lend me your money—the money you've pinched to save, ever since you were eighteen—on a project no bank would back?"

Eben looked up, and behind the glasses his eyes were sparkling with the humor that ran like mirthful, warm, quick brook water over the bottom-rock seriousness of his mind. "Do you remember our Grandfather Stratton—how he used to pray every night that none of his kin would ever get sinfully rich? Well, I am sure he would have heartily approved my chancing my money with you. . ."

IT WAS with a fresh respect for his brother, and indeed for all staid, bookish stay-at-home New England, that Craig went back west. The man who would stake the savings of a lifetime with such quixotic impulsiveness was the kind of adventurer he could understand.

In Lakehead he hired a horse and went north along the stake trail Durstine had blazed, overtaking the survey party after three days of hard riding. The young engineer had proved his mettle. He had starved; twice his supply wagons had strayed or been delayed for days. He had been lost, half drowned, broiled by a midsummer sun to which his fair skin, that would not tan, never grew inured.

Twenty men under him had succumbed and quit; but

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he had stayed, and his first thought on meeting Craig was to display the records he had guarded with his life every moment of the day and night.

Craig looked less at those records, however, than at him. Emaciated, blistered, fever-racked, Durstine was a pathetic but gallant figure. He was every man who ever struggled, sick, starved, bleeding preposterously across the face of immensity in advance of an expanding civilization. Craig said considerately:

"Take out these records, Tom, and turn them over to Mike Slane. Rest a while, or get drunk, or do whatever it is that you have to do to get back in shape, and then come back. Bring a party with you—ten or twelve men. We'll need replacements."

"I'd rather stay until the job is finished," Durstine protested valiantly; though the moment's wild relief that showed in his eyes gave him the lie. He had been near the breaking point.

He left next day, and Craig took charge of the survey. And then for weeks he forgot everything else, in his absorption with the work.

It was a quite different task from that of surveying charted country. Actually, what he was doing was sifting a wilderness through his fingers; the biggest patch of habitable country left unsettled in America, and the most unpredictable and capricious.

The steaming oceans, the great glaciers that had shaped it had left the land a tangle of paradoxes. Smooth strips of prairie lay islanded among forests so mighty that they were dim, almost, by day as by night; mountains of red ore rose abruptly from the middle of barren yellow sand.

Scouting most of the time in advance of his survey, Craig yielded himself so completely to the fascination of the land that for a long time it did not occur to him even to ask after Durstine; and then he was startled at being told that the man had not been heard of since his departure.

THE party was camped that night on the headwaters of the Trout, a tributary of the Menominee: the broad, placid stream that formed the devious eastern boundary of Wisconsin and Upper Michigan.

Away thirteen consecutive days on reconnaissance of the iron beds farther north, Craig had been savoring this taste of camp life with his fellows—the sweeter because he so seldom indulged it. A big fire rose among the tall pines, reddening their trunks, but the remoter half circle of little tents, to which most of the men already had withdrawn, glowed dully, almost blue, like dying coals against the darkness of the forest.

Hauck, his typographer, was making a profile map, graphic of the day's survey, by the firelight, but at mention of Durstine he had broken off abruptly, looking suddenly very unhappy.

"Not even the supply teamsters have seen or heard of him. They've asked around at Lakehead every trip, for the past month," he said.

"What about Mike Slane? He could tell them, at least, whether he arrived safely."

"They haven't seen Slane, either." Hauck bent to his work again, with a troubled air. He was an oldish, powerfully muscled man, self taught but capable; ideal material for a construction superintendent, Craig thought. Hauck added, after a pause: "Maybe Tom's just stayed drunk, or can't bring himself to come back. A man can crack like, like a pencil, when he's pushed too hard."

Craig tried to persuade himself it was no worse, but failed to be convincing. Durstine wasn't the kind to stay drunk, or funk coming back. Next morning he took one of the supply wagons, returning empty to Lakehead, arriving there early the day after.

The town was quiet now, drowsing through the unseasonable warmth of a late October day. He inquired at both hotels and all the saloons, resultlessly, and was about to take stage for Madison when he ran into Slane.

The man was haggard and unkempt. He carried a plump tote sack, and his manner puzzled Craig. His greeting was too effusive, and he talked with a random garrulity that stirred suspicion in Craig. Abruptly he cut the other short.

"What are you holding back, Mike?" he demanded sternly.

"Huh? Holdin' back? What the hell you talkin' about?" Slane tried to look injured, but succeeded only in looking more flustered.

Craig continued to eye him severely. "Is it Durstine? Has something happened to him?"

"Who? Tom? What about him?" Slane twitched under Craig's eyes, suddenly yielded. "Wal, yes. I didn't want to tell you—but Tom got hurt."

"How?"

Mike said slowly: "Somebody shot him. Got him through the left arm an' left shoulder, high, an' grooved his left hip. An' then they slugged him over the head with a gun butt an' come away, leavin' him for dead. They got them survey records, Jeff."

"WHO did it?" said Craig. A flame of rage was going through him, and it must have leaped up, hot and red, into his eyes, for Slane said:

"Take it easy, Jeff. He ain't dead. He's been pulled off the plank road, into a thicket; but his horse come in an' we located him from the blood trail. It was nip an' tuck with him for a while, but he's all right now. I got him at Jack McClain's ol' place, four, five, miles out the Sheboygan road."

"Why away out there?"

"Because," said Slane evenly, "he don't know who shot him. It might've been anybody, so I can't trust anybody. I ain't told no one where he is."

"I know who shot him. And so do you. Where's Barstow, Mike?"

"At the Wycliffe house. The storekeep jest told me. They're holdin' a railroad dinner there—him an' Granville an' Milt Wycliffe, an' some o' their committeemen. Prob'bly layin' plans for the big indignation meetin' Saturday. You better not be here Saturday, Jeff."

"Why not?" Craig said.

"Because you'll be the object of all the indignation. Things ain't been goin' so well with their road. They got money enough. They took in near two million dollars' worth o' mortgages the first two weeks, an' a million or two more must've come in since. But no work's been done. In four months, not a mile has even been surveyed. Barstow blames you—claims you grabbed off the only practical route, the only one that could be operated at a profit."

"That's true. But it's no crime. He had the same chance."

"I know that. But you can't tell it to men that have everything they own laid down on his road, that've been filled full o' lies by his newspaper. It's a powder keg,

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Jeff, an' this meetin's li'ble to touch it off. You better go back up in the woods a while."

"No," said Craig. The rage in him was a blazing fury now, but he subdued it and said calmly enough: "I'm going to attend that dinner myself, Mike. I have a little indignation to get out of my own system. Where did you say it was being held?"

"At Ann Wycliffe's house. That big place down at the end of the lake road." Slane was looking at him intently, tempted to remonstrate; but he saw by Craig's grim face that it would be futile. He only said: "It wouldn't do any good, I guess, to tell you you're bein' a damn fool?"

"Not a bit." Craig watched Slane turn and walk back into the store from which he had emerged a few minutes before, and return without his tote sack. He said: "I don't suppose it would do any good either, Mike, for me to tell you that you couldn't come along?"

He studied Slane a moment, frowning, and then suddenly he smiled.

"Not a bit," Slane said, and walked resolutely away beside him.

CHAPTER X

THE SHOW IS ON

THE great house Judge Wycliffe had built to show his faith in a community that consisted of no more than a few scattered shanties, a trading post, and his own mill, dangled precariously on the edge of wilderness, had been a favorite haunt of Barstow's ever since the night he had been persuaded to dine there.

Granville, he found, had not misrepresented; the dinner had been excellent, the girl charming; and he had accepted, almost literally, her invitation to make the house his own. On the big, tall columned piazza, stretched all across the central part of the house, he had received the committeemen at conferences held almost daily through the whole of that hot, dry summer.

Later, as the weather cooled, she had turned over to him, for an office and reception room, the walnut-paneled library that occupied most of the east wing; and she had agreed readily to preside at today's dinner, called to secure the approval of certain key committeemen of the mass meeting Granville and Barstow planned for the following Saturday.

Two hours earlier, twenty-three persons had sat down around the massive Phyfe table in the Wycliffe dining hall, in the wing oposite the library, famous for the venison feasts and bear barbecues at which the late Judge had entertained governors, senators, all visiting notables, as well as everyone in his own community who cared to attend.

Of the diners, however, only five now remained: Barstow, Granville, Mitchell, Wycliffe, and Ann. The others had dined, sipped appreciatively the good, home-made wines, heard a terse speech by Barstow, and gone away agreeing that a strong demonstration ought to be made against Jeffrey Craig's preëmption of a right of way.

Just what form this demonstration was to take, or what was to be gained by it, had not been made quite clear. Barstow had talked so convincingly that they had gone away certain that they understood and endorsed him.

But later, freed of the spell of his mesmeric voice, many wondered why they could not recall clearly much that he had said.

AT THE table's foot, Ann was perplexing herself with that question now. Barstow was at the other end, a fine figure of a man: large, handsome, immaculate; dynamic-looking, even in repose, like a relaxed great cat.

But he was silent; and before now she had found a curious disappointment in his silences. He seemed another person; strange, exotic—smaller. She blamed herself for this feeling, deeming it treachery; but it would not down.

She said suddenly: "Mr. Barstow, I'm afraid I don't quite understand why this meeting is being called. May I ask some questions?"

Her uncle, up the table from her, to the left, looked at her in blunt irritation. But Barstow was unperturbed, giving her his whole gracious attention.

"Ask any questions you like, of course," he said.

"Isn't it true that Mr. Craig has a charter to build a road?" she asked. He nodded, and she went on: "Then isn't he entitled to take any route he chooses, providing he gets down his survey stakes first, and records his survey according to law?"

"Yes," said Barstow, "providing he really intends to build. But of course he doesn't. This survey is just another form of blackmail."

"How do you know that?"

Her uncle spoke sharply: "Your question is almost insulting, Ann. I've been telling it to my readers for months, in print; Mr. Barstow and Mr. Granville have said so repeatedly. You appear to be questioning our good faith."

Barstow lifted a strong, well cared-for hand. "Please, Milt. Your niece's question is a good one, and she has a perfect right to ask it. What you're saying, Miss Wycliffe, is that you've been told over and over again that Craig's a crook, but that so far no satisfactory proof has been offered. Isn't that it?"

"Yes," she said, grateful for his coming to her aid.

"You pose a hard problem," he said. "We base our opinion of him on intangibles; but intangibles aren't proof. For that you'll have to wait until he himself supplies it."

"How would he do that?"

"By presenting his demands. I don't believe you'll have long to wait. His survey is almost completed now, so he is in an excellent position to hold for a price."

"And what will you do? Will you pay it?"

"I suppose we shall have to—providing it isn't too unreasonable." He smiled at her, a little ruefully. "That hardly seems heroic, does it—yielding tamely to blackmail? But I see no other way, short of open warfare."

"I think it is very heroic," she said. "I know how hard it must be to yield without fighting, to save trouble and bloodshed. It takes a big man to do that. Really big."

She spoke with the warmth of complete conviction, and Granville, sitting across from Wycliffe, looked up the table at his associate with a sincere respect. Better than anyone else in the room, he could appreciate the deftness of Barstow's replies, because he guessed the strategy behind them.

The attack on Durstine, the theft of the survey records, had puzzled him, and Barstow had not been communicative; but now he understood it. By representing Craig as a blackmailer who must be bought off at all costs, Barstow could milk the mortgage fund of almost any sum he chose for the purpose; but by seizing the records, he had reduced the value of what he had to buy, thus assuring himself a fat profit on the transaction.

Everyone in the community had heard about the assault upon the young engineer, but they had accepted Wycliffe's

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easy explanation that it was the work of drunken Indians, and the incident was almost forgotten.

GRANVILLE'S cautious mind saw only one danger; and this he pointed out to Barstow when the four men had withdrawn to the drawing room, and its doors had been folded behind them:

"Suppose Craig won't sell? Suppose he elects to resurvey and start building?"

"He'll sell." Barstow sank into the satin-surfaced comfort of a deep chair. He looked around the room, inhaling the dignified beauty of its appointments pleasurably as he inhaled the smoke of his cigar. One wall was paneled with walnut from floor to ceiling, the others papered with lively landscapes. There was an abundance of furniture—highboys, lowboys, a desk and secretary, a massive centertable, a dozen chairs; but the room had not the cluttered look of many drawing rooms of the time.

He said: "Luke, the man that built this house had taste; a gift I appreciate the more because I seem not to possess it myself. He built his house big, and he built it solidly, to last; but he put charm into it, too. That's a difficult combination to achieve."

"It's a good property," Granville agreed absently. "What makes you so sure Craig will sell?"

"Because a thousand people are going to adopt a resolution at our meeting Saturday to tear up every mile of track he tries to lay. He'll sell, when he hears that."

The front door knocker sounded preemptorily. They heard Ann hurrying in from the dining room, to answer it; readily distinguishable, by her quick light tread, from the heavy-footed hired girl who had helped her with the dinner.

Her voice sounded, rapid and startled, in greeting; and Barstow tensed at the sound of a man's deep voice answering her. He started up, then sank back into his chair; and he looked quite unruffled when she pushed back the hall door and ushered in two callers.

"Hello, Craig. Hello, Slane," he said. Craig nodded curtly, Slane only glowered, but Barstow went on easily: "I hadn't expected you so soon, Craig. Your survey can't be finished already?"

"No," said Craig. "This is just a flying visit. Or would 'surprise' be a better word for it?"

He was urbane as Barstow, but Ann could feel a tension in the air between them, electric with hostility; and it was with reluctance that she obeyed a gestured command from her uncle, and withdrew. She would have given a great deal to be permitted to sit through the drama she was sure the next few minutes would bring.

CHAPTER XI

COLD-DECK JOKER

CRAIG waited until the doors were closed again, and then said: "One of my men was attacked almost three months ago, Barstow. He was first shot, then clubbed, and left to die.

"An odd thing about it is that, until then, there had been no shootings hereabouts in twenty years. Men have fought with fists and boots and cantdogs and whiskey bottles; but they've fought man to man, face to face, without guns."

"Indeed?" said Barstow. "Well, it's all most unfortunate, but I don't see what you expect me to do about it. I suggest you speak to the sheriff."

"That wouldn't do much good. No sheriff can do much about attacks like that: treacherous, from ambush. They have to be anticipated."

"I suppose," said Barstow, "you mean you'll warn your men to be more careful hereafter?"

"I mean more than that. I mean that the next time it happens I'll make my own reprisals; not on the man that may have done the deed—that could be anybody—but on the man that ordered it done.

"Maybe that isn't plain enough, Barstow. What I'm saying is that if another man of mine is attacked, I'm coming after you. If he's badly injured, I'll beat most of the life out of you. If he's killed, I'll beat it all out."

Barstow sat quite still, altogether expressionless except for the nervous twitching of his nostrils. He said at length, softly: "You know, Craig, I'm tempted to invite you to try that now. I don't believe you could do it, even with the odds even—even if only you and I were in this room. But I'm not going to be foolish. I'm holding too much. With you, of course, it's different. You haven't got a card."

"Are you quite sure of that?" Craig said.

"Quite sure. You never held much. You had a charter, you were able to raise a little money in the East; and in usurping that right of way, you seemed to be making a good play. But it wasn't. You were reaching into the pockets of all the men with money invested in my company; and they don't like that, Craig. They're holding a meeting Saturday, to show you how little they like it."

BARSTOW took the cigar out of his mouth, looked at it thoughtfully. "If you're smart, you won't be here Saturday, Craig. You'll stay just long enough to salvage what you can to pay your transportation elsewhere. I'd be glad to provide you with funds for the purpose. I'm a reasonable man."

"How reasonable?" said Craig.

Barstow kept looking at his cigar. "Reasonable enough to realize that a man of your kind likes to travel in decent comfort and take care of some of his friends as well. For instance, Mr. Slane there might need transportation money, too. Would fifteen thousand be enough? Ten for you, five for him?"

"It might," Craig answered, "if we were going anywhere. But we're not. I'm staying for that meeting Saturday. There's something I want to say to your stockholders."

Barstow looked up quickly; as quickly veiled his eyes again. "You would have nothing to say that would interest them."

"I believe I have. I'd tell them the truth about that attack on Durstine. This meeting is being called, as I understand it, to express indignation because I got ahead of them in surveying a right of way; but when they learn that all my survey records up to the county line have been lost, that they and I start even again, there won't be much left for them to get indignant about, will there, Barstow?

Not unless they get indignant with you for trying to deceive them."

From the chair in which he had been huddled, Granville drew a deep, noisy breath. He had thought he had anticipated every possible move Craig could make, but he had overlooked this; the one move that could beat them.

And Barstow, for once, showed something. His large, white teeth crunched together upon his cigar so viciously

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that it broke and drooped, splayed and lifeless, from a corner of his thin, vague mouth.

"Craig," he said—and his voice had lost its urbanity, was harsh and deep now—"you spoke a few moments ago about what would happen if any of your men were attacked. But have you thought that the same thing might happen to you—between now and Saturday, say?"

"Yes," said Craig. "And I've thought of what would follow. I have some good men in my survey crews; hard, loyal men, who would react in about the same way as I would if something happened to them. They'd go after the man that was responsible."

BARSTOW sat still a moment, his nostrils twitching, his strong white fingers nervous on the arms of the chair. Then he rose, removed the ruined cigar from his mouth, dropped it into a receptacle upon the center table. His flash of rage was gone quickly as it had come; his look at Craig was intent but curious, almost impersonal.

"You're a better man than I thought you were," he said. "It would do no good, I suppose, to offer you more money to pull out? Fifty thousand, say?"

"No," said Craig.

Barstow took some glasses off a highboy, set them on the table; filled them with brandy from a decanter. He had the cold, white luminosity that Granville observed with a fascination bred of his knowledge of the man's magnificent ingenuity in just such situations as this—in those crises where he seemed hopelessly beaten.

That mind of his was a marvelous instrument, so quick and deft that it seemed to arrive at conclusions sometimes with the speed and certainty of intuition; but it was not mental power alone that made him so formidable. He had, too, an utter lack of moral principle that gave him a strong advantage over most other men in any contest either of brain or brawn; the same edge he allowed himself in playing solitaire.

And in any contest, as in solitaire, he almost always won.

He held out one glass to Craig, another to Slane. "Sit down, gentlemen, and let's see whether we can't talk this matter out. Building railroads is a big game. It's big enough for all of us, unless we persist in squabbling. But then there'd be nothing left for anybody."

Craig remained standing, but accepted the drink. Slane, however, refused even that.

"Don't p'laver with him, Jeff," he advised earnestly. "You've had your say, now let's go."

Barstow smiled. "Your friend, Mr. Slane, makes a common error. He doesn't know when to stop fighting." He poured a drink for himself, drank it slowly, reflectively; and then he crossed the big central hall to the library, returning with a map case. He pulled down a big, detailed map of the state.

"I want you to try to look at this situation impersonally," he said to Craig. "The railroad that both you and I want to build runs north from Junction City on the M. and M. railroad, about midway between Milwaukee and Madison, through the Winnebago basin and across the Wisconsin-Michigan border to the south shore of Lake Superior.

"It's a good line, and one that promises to be profitable; but it's by no means the only possible one. Another attractive venture would be a line branching northeast off this one at Beale's Creek, eight or nine miles north of Lakehead and running forty-odd miles up the Fox River valley to Grand Kaukalin, connecting there with a short line railroad that runs south from Green Bay." He tapped the map.

"This line would require only a moderate amount of capital, it would tap older, better settled country, and realize an immediate profit. Besides a certain amount of revenue from the farming communities already in existence, there would be other, quick revenues from the sawmills and stone works that would be established. It's fine timber and granite country."

"I KNOW," said Craig. "I looked over that country, with some such idea in mind. But the route has already been chartered to a company called the Kaukalin and Western."

"I'm the Kaukalin and Western. That's my charter," Barstow said. "I had intended to build there, but—I'll be frank with you—I want to build north more. I want it so much that I'll surrender the charter to you if you'll surrender your own charter to a road north and allow me the benefit of your survey.

"I'll lend you three thousand tons of rail iron, enough to track your whole road, at a fair yearly rental, payable out of revenue, and a fair reciprocal agreement on such cars of yours as come over my road and such cars of mine as are handled by yours.

"I don't have to tell you I'm making an offer that's more than fair."

"Don't listen to 'im, Jeff," Slane pleaded. "It's jest some trick."

Craig was inclined to agree. The man's change of front had been too abrupt, his offer too munificent. He said:

"That sounds fair enough, Barstow, but there are a couple of things about it I don't like. One is that if you lent me rail iron, I'd be entirely at your mercy. You could take back your rails any time you pleased, and I'd be left with nothing but a roadbed. For another, my road would be more dependent on yours than yours on mine, and you could ruin me any time you pleased by revising the rates."

Barstow smiled easily. "Craig, you don't think I'd have the effrontery to ask you to accept such a proposition without guarantees? I'll give you an iron-clad contract granting you the rails in perpetuity for an agreed rental that can under no circumstances be revised. We'd make a similar agreement on car handlings. What do you say?"

Craig pondered. He knew Barstow was not a man to be trusted; yet this offer did seem fair, even generous. He would make sure that those agreements were so drawn that they could not be repudiated; but granted that, he saw no way that he could lose.

Behind him Mike Slane was muttering warnings; but there were reasons which he could not explain to Mike just then for favoring the proposal. The most compelling was that, at the moment, he had little choice. He hadn't money enough, he saw no way to raise the money, for the construction of a three- or four-hundred-mile road.

But he could build fifty miles, with rail iron—the most expensive single item in railroad building—supplied him on a rental basis, payable out of revenues.

He had one more objection: "Barstow, I don't understand your being so liberal with rail iron. I thought you'd have trouble getting enough for yourself."

"I might have, except for a stroke of luck. On my last trip east, I rant into Gavin Stevenson, the Allegheny iron man. A while back, he made fifteen thousand tons of rail iron on order for the M. and M. They planned an extension to the Pacific, but the project never got past the

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promotional stage. With no other market immediately available, he offered me the whole lot at such an attractive figure that I bought it all, even though I shall probably need no more than ten thousand tons. So I can afford to be liberal with the rest."

"I see," said Craig. That did seem plausible. He had heard of Stevenson and his trouble with the M. and M. He said: "All right, Barstow. I'll get an attorney and meet you at the hotel this evening to close the deal."

"Fine." Barstow extended a hand, which Craig accepted, but Slane ignored. They departed, and Barstow went to the window to watch them out of sight. He was smiling faintly.

"Let him get an attorney. Let him get a whole corps of them. They'd never see the joker in those agreements," he said.

The cadaverous, taciturn Mitchell broke a silence of hours. "I don't, myself."

Barstow turned to him. "You know, don't you, that the laws of this state provide that the purchaser of a bankrupt corporation buys all its privileges and immunities, but none of its obligations?"

"I didn't," said Mitchell. "But now that I do, I still fail to see what it has to do with this transaction."

"Craig's lawyer won't see it either. Neither will he until it's too late."

ANN threw back the doors between the drawing room and the dining room, cleared now of its after-dinner disarray. She came in. She was burning to find out what had gone on.

Her impatience derived from no mere curiosity. Deep in her heart was the hope that Barstow might have been wrong about Craig; that he had come not to take, but to give—to offer, with a largeness of gesture that seemed consistent with the kind of man he seemed to be, his route and his services to a people's railroad.

In the four months past, many of her ideals had been threatened, but she still wanted to believe there were men in the world capable of big gestures.

She said, with assumed lightness: "Well, the ogre has come and departed. Was his price high?"

"Very high," said Parstow. "Higher even than I had anticipated. It cost me the K. and W. charter and three thousand tons of rail iron to get rid of him."

He turned and smiled.

"Oh," she said, in a flat, hard voice. She did not have to ask questions about that Kaukalin charter. He had talked of it before, and she knew how valuable a property it was. And knowing that, she experienced such a revulsion of feeling for Craig that she had to turn away to hide her tears and fury.

She felt that she never wanted to see him again. She felt, then, that she never wanted to see another man, or hear another word about a railroad.

That month she had turned nineteen. And at nineteen, disillusionments are like some sudden jaundice, that discolor all the world.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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Obstinate Uncle Otis

Otis Morks was terrible stubborn, prob'ly the most mule-headed man in Vermont. Fact, he was so cantankerous, he almost done away with the universe one time—the whole danged cosmos. Here's how it happened

By Robert Arthur

Author of "Just a Dreamer," "The Devil's Garden," etc.

Otis tried to ignore that lightning, but it hit the tree and knocked him twenty feet

"HERE'S an item about a man who was so obstinate"—Fowler, who sells life insurance, lowered the club's copy of the *Times* to chuckle—"so obstinate that rather than pay a twelve-dollar fine, he stayed in jail sixteen years!"

"My Uncle Otis," Morks said in a thoughtful tone, "was far more obstinate than that."

Fowler gave him an impatient glance. For Murchison Morks, who was waiting to read the *Times* himself—Morks does all his reading at the club, where it is free—has always seen something stranger, been some place more inaccessible, or known someone more extraordinary than any of the other members. This has gained him a certain unpopularity in the club, though he does not seem to be aware of it.

"This fellow," Fowler said harshly, "not only stayed in jail sixteen years rather than pay the twelve-dollar fine, but when they wanted to set him free, he was so obstinate he wouldn't go!"

Morks stared moodily at the copy of the *Times* in Fowler's hands. "My uncle," he sighed, "was so obstinate he was dangerous."

Fowler laid the *Times* across his knee and scowled. "Dangerous how?" he demanded. "To himself or to others?"

"Both," Morks told him. "Dangerous to himself, and dangerous to the whole town in which he lived. He was dangerous to the entire United States. He was dangerous to the whole world. In fact I'm not sure, I really am not sure, but what he was so obstinate that he constituted a menace to the entire universe."

Fowler clenched the *Times* in a manner that threatened to pulp it. Fowler was a large man. And his face was turning purple with anger.

"Exactly how," he demanded through clenched teeth, "could your Uncle Otis be so obstinate that he was dangerous to the whole universe?"

Morks brightened. "Well, if you'd really like to have me tell you—" And before anyone could possibly have stopped him, he began.

MY UNCLE'S name was Morks (he said), the same as mine. His full name was Otis Morks. He lived on a small farm in Vermont, and I hadn't seen him for several years. So the first hint I had of the startling change that took place in him shortly after his fifty-seventh birthday was an unexpected telegram from my Aunt Edith, his sister.

It reached me one morning just as I was sitting down to breakfast, and after reading it I wired that I was coming on the first train. For it said:

Otis struck by lightning. Situation serious. Please come at once.

By "situation serious" I assumed that Aunt Edith meant Uncle Otis' condition was serious, as any man's might well be after he had been struck by lightning. But beyond my concern for Uncle Otis, there was an undertone of unexplained urgency in those ten commonplace words that impelled me to haste. So forty minutes later I was pulling out of Grand Central for Vermont.

Late that afternoon I descended in Hillport, Vermont, where my Uncle Otis lived.

There was only one taxi at the station, an ancient tour-

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ing car driven by a village character named Jud Perkins. Jud, who had tobacco-stained whiskers, was also constable, and as I climbed into his decrepit vehicle I saw that he had a gun strapped around his waist.

I also noticed, across the square, a group of people standing around staring at something. Then I realized they were gazing at an empty granite pedestal that had formerly held a large bronze statue of a local statesman named Ogilby—an individual Uncle Otis had always held in utmost contempt.

Uncle Otis obstinately would never believe that anybody would erect a statue to Ogilby, and had never admitted that the deed had been done—that there actually was such a statue in the village square. But there had been, and it had been a massive thing. Nonetheless it was gone now.

The old car got under way with a lurch and a groan. I leaned forward and asked Jud Perkins where the statue had gone. He turned and squinted at me sidewise.

"Stole," he informed me, in a tone of deep knowingness. "Stole yestidday afternoon, 'bout five. In plain view. Yessir, took between two winks of an eye. We was all in Simpkins' store, talkin' about it—me 'n' Simpkins 'n' your Uncle Otis Morks 'n' your Aunt Edith 'n' some others. Somebody said as how the town ought to clean it. Your Uncle Otis stuck out his chin like he does when he's gonna be obstinate.

" 'What statue' he wanted to know, his eyebrows bristlin'. 'There ain't no such thing as a statue to a blubbery-mouthed nincompoop like Ogilby in this town!'

"So, though I knowed it wasn't any use, he wouldn't believe in th' statue if he walked right into it an' broke a leg—never met as obstinate a man as Otis Morks for not believing in a thing he don't like—anyway I turned around to point at it. And dad blast if it weren't gone. Minute before it'd been there. Now it wasn't. Stole between one look and the next, it had been!"

Jud Perkins spat over the side of the car, and turned to look at me in an authoritative manner.

"An' if you want to know who did it," he said confidentially, "these here Fifth Columnists, that's who. Spies! They took Ogilby 'cause he was bronze, see? Over there they need all th' copper an' bronze they c'n get for makin' shells. So they're stealin' it an' shippin' it over by submarine. When we catch 'em, we'll find out how. And I got my eyes skinned for 'em. I got me my pistol, an' I'm on th' watch."

WE BUMPED and banged through town, toward Uncle Otis' farm, and Jud Perkins, turning once in a while to look at the road, continued to bring me up to date on local affairs. He told me how Uncle Otis had come to be struck by lightning—out of his own obstinacy, as I had suspected.

"He takes a walk every afternoon, your Uncle Otis does," Jud told me, between expectorations of tobacco juice. "Day 'fore yestiday he went out anyway, though it was blowing up a whopper of a thunder storm, an' your Aunt Edith begged him not to go. Storm came up while he was out in th' fields, an' he got in under a big oak. Told him myself a thousand times that trees draw lightning, but he's too obstinate to listen.

"Maybe he thought he c'd ignore that lightning, same way he does Willoughby's barn across the road, that he pretends ain't there; or Marble Hill, that his cousin Seth lawed away from him so that now he won't admit there is any such hill! Or th' new dam th' state put in to make a water reservoir, an' flooded some grazing land he always used, so that now your Uncle Otis acts 's if you're crazy when you talk about there bein' a dam there. Ignoringest man ever lived, your Uncle Otis.

"But 's I was saying, maybe he tried to ignore that lightning, and it didn't work. Lightning's mighty hard to ignore. So it hit that oak, and your Uncle Otis' own blamed obstinacy might 've killed him then 'n' there.

"Only reason it didn't, I guess, is because he's always had such prime good health. Ain't been sick a day in his life, 's far as I know, 'cept that week twenty years ago when he fell off a horse an' had his amnesia, an' thought he was a farm machinery salesman named Eustace Lingham, from Cleveland, Ohio.

"Where was I? Oh, yeah, th' lightning splintered that old oak 'n' knocked your Uncle Otis twenty feet. Your Aunt Edith seen it 'n' run out to drag him in. She put him to bed an' called Doc Perkins. Doc said it was just shock, he'd come to pretty soon, but keep him in bed two 'r three days to be sure.

"Sure enough, your Uncle Otis come to, 'bout supper, but he wouldn't stay in bed. Said he felt fine, never felt better, and by dad, yestiday in Simpkins' store I never seen him lookin' more fit. Talked brisk like a youngster, walked like he was on springs, and seemed to give out electricity from every pore. 'S if the lightning did him good, like these here galvanic treatments for the rheumatism."

I inquired if increasing age had softened Uncle Otis' natural obstinacy any. Jud Perkins sighed and spat with extra copiousness.

"Made it worse," he stated flatly. "Most obstinate man in Vermont, your Uncle Otis. Maybe in the whole world. Dad blast it, when he says a thing ain't, even though it's right there in front of you, blamed if he don't say it so positive you almost believe him 'n' not your own eyes.

"Sat on his front stoop myself, only last week, with that old barn o' Willoughby's spang in the way of the view, an' your Uncle Otis lookin' at it as if it weren't there.

" 'Fine view,' I said, 'iff'n only that barn wasn't there,' an' your Uncle Otis looked at me like I was crazy.

" 'Barn?' he said. 'What barn? No barn there, and never has been. Finest view in Vermont. See for ten miles.'

"Blamed if I don't think your Uncle Otis believed it. He's hated that barn so much, he's put it right out of his mind, an' now he can't even see it when he looks at it. Same way with Ogilby's statue, the dam, Marble Hill, th' new WPA bridge, an' I dunno how many other things. People, too."

Jud Perkins chuckled, and just missed running down a yellow dog and a boy on a bicycle.

"There's people got so much faith they can believe in what ain't," he said. "But your Uncle Otis is th' only man I ever met so obstinate he c'n disbelieve in things that is."

UNCLE OTIS' obstinacy had not changed any, then. His ability to dismiss from existence, as far as he was concerned anyway, things he didn't like or didn't believe in had always been well developed. Psychologists have a term for that, though offhand I can't remember the word. I dare say no psychologist ever met such a well developed

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ability as Uncle Otis', though. It's a pity none ever had a chance to study him. They'd have gotten material enough for a whole shelf of books.

There was a whole host of things Uncle Otis had put out of his mind with such obstinate completeness that they no longer existed for him. They ranged from an expensive cream separator that had never worked and had been a constant exasperation to him, to Marble Hill, which Jud Perkins had mentioned.

Marble Hill had marble beneath its surface and might some day be worth something. Uncle Otis' second cousin, discovering a flaw in Otis' title, had won it away in a long legal battle. After that Uncle Otis had decided to ignore its existence in his own particular fashion, and had. Since it was a hundred and eighty feet high, covered three hundred acres, and loomed up only a quarter of a mile away behind the house, his ability along those lines was obviously no mean thing.

There was a whole host of other things that Uncle Otis obstinately refused to believe in, too, though they were of a more distant nature. Being a Republican, Hoover's defeat annoyed him. In fact, he never acknowledged it, and as far as he was concerned, Hoover was still president. He did not admit the existence of President Roosevelt.

Also, Uncle Otis had a deep-rooted suspicion of far-off places with curious names, like Madagascar, Guatemala, Zanzibar, Polynesia. He had flatly stated numerous times that no such places existed. That they had been invented by unscrupulous fiction writers who pretended to visit them, then wrote lucrative travel books about them.

I was wondering how such a little man as Uncle Otis could be so obstinate when Jud Perkins, with a chuckle, pointed out a long steel bridge spanning the river that ran through Hillport. We didn't cross the bridge, but we could see it plainly; a new, substantial structure.

"Your Uncle Otis plain hates that bridge," Jud Perkins told me. "It goes across a corner of land condemned away from him. He was mighty peeved at losing the land, even if he was paid for it. So he won't admit there is any bridge. He says—"

He stopped talking, his mouth still open, and jerked so convulsively that the car headed into a ditch. At the last minute he managed to yank the wheel around, and we climbed back onto the road, but his face was pale and dewed with sweat, and he was shaken.

"Jeepers!" he gasped. "Creepers! They're at work again! We gotta do something!"

He stepped on the gas. I turned, to take another look at the bridge, wondering what he meant.

And I daresay I turned a little pale myself. For the bridge was no longer there. The road leading up to it was as before. The island in mid-river holding a concrete support pier was still there. The road on the other side of the river was still there.

But the steel bridge I had seen just before was gone.

I WAS in a thoughtful mood when Jud Perkins dropped me at Uncle Otis' gate and thundered back to town to spread the news. Uncle Otis wasn't in sight, but I headed around to the rear of the house and Aunt Edith came hurrying out of the kitchen, her apron, skirts, hair, and hands all fluttering.

"Oh, Murchison!" she exclaimed. "I'm so glad you're here. I don't know what to do. I simply don't. The most dreadful thing has happened to Otis, and—"

Then I saw Otis himself, going down the front walk to get the evening paper from a tin receptacle at the gate. His small, spare figure upright and a stubborn jaw outthrust, his bushy white eyebrows bristling, he looked unaltered to me. But Aunt Edith only wrung her hand when I said so.

"I know," she sighed. "If you didn't know the truth, you'd think it actually did him good to be hit by lightning. But here he comes. I can't tell you any more now. After supper! He mustn't be allowed to guess— Oh, I do hope nothing dreadful happens before we can stop it!"

And then, as Uncle Otis approached with his paper, she fled back into the kitchen.

Uncle Otis certainly did not seem changed, unless for the better. As Jud Perkins had remarked, he seemed younger. He shook my hand heartily, and my arm tingled, as if from an electric shock. His eyes sparkled. His whole being seemed keyed up and bouyant with mysterious energy.

We strolled toward the front porch and stood facing the rotting old barn across the road that had spoiled the view. Grasping for a conversational topic as I studied Uncle Otis to try to discover what Aunt Edith meant, I suggested it was too bad the storm two days before hadn't blown it down and finished it.

Uncle Otis stared at me.

"Barn?" he demanded, scowling. "What barn? No barn there, boy! Nothing but the view—finest in Vermont. If you c'n see a barn there, you better get to a doctor 's fast 's you can hike."

As Jud Perkins had remarked, he spoke so convincingly that in spite of myself I had to turn for another look at the structure. I remained staring for quite some time, I expect, and probably I blinked.

Because Uncle Otis was telling the truth.

There wasn't any barn—now.

ALL through supper a suspicion of the incredible truth grew on me, especially when I turned to peer through the window and see that the barn was indeed gone, only an area of littered hay remaining to tell it had ever existed. And after supper, while Uncle Otis read his paper in the parlor, I followed Aunt Edith into the kitchen.

She only sighed when I told her about the barn, and looked at me with haunted eyes.

"Tell me, Murchison," she asked fearfully, "was—was the new bridge there when you came by?"

I told her, and she went a little paler.

"I was afraid of that," she murmured. "Otis was reading yesterday's paper just before you came, and he came to a piece about how much traffic goes across the bridge, and that made him snort.

" 'Bridge!' I heard him say. 'What bridge they talking about? No new bridg around here!' And—and—now it's gone, too," she finished. "Like the Ogilby statue, and the cream separator that was down cellar, and Willoughby's barn."

"You mean—" I began, and Aunt Edith nodded unhappily.

"Yes," she whispered. "It's Otis. I knew when the statue—went—yesterday when we were in Simpkins' store. I was looking right at it when Otis said what he did and it—it just was gone, right from under my eyes.

"First it was the cream separator. That was night before last, right after Otis got out of bed and said he felt

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fine. I wanted to store some preserves down cellar, and I asked him if he'd move it to the barn. He said I was crazy, wasn't any cream separator down cellar and never had been. And—and when I went down later, it was gone! I didn't understand, then. But when the statue went I—I knew."

"You mean," I asked thoughtfully, "that since Uncle Otis was struck by lightning, his obstinateness has taken a new turn. That he used to think things he didn't like didn't exist, and that was all. But now when he thinks it, due to some peculiar heightening of his tremendously obstinate will power, the things *don't* exist? He just *disbelieves* them into not being."

Aunt Edith nodded. "They just *go*," she cried, almost wildly. "When he says a thing's not, now it's *not*."

I reflected on this curious new turn that Uncle Otis' obstinacy had taken, and I confess I felt slightly uneasy. There were a number of distinctly unpleasant possibilities that occurred to me, and I knew Aunt Edith had thought of them too.

"What," I asked presently, "do you suppose the limit is? A statue, a barn, a bridge—where do you suppose it stops?"

"I don't know," she told me. "Maybe there isn't any limit to it. Otis is an *awfully* obstinate man, and now—suppose something reminds him about the dam? Suppose he says there isn't any dam? It's a hundred feet high, and all that water behind it—"

She did not have to finish. If Uncle Otis suddenly disbelieved the Hillport dam out of existence, the impounded water that would be set free would wipe away the village, and might easily kill the whole five hundred inhabitants. And that was by no means the most disastrous possibility that occurred to me.

"And then, of course, there's whole countries he never has believed were real," Aunt Edith whispered, echoing my thoughts. "Like Zanzibar and Martinique."

"And Guatemala and Polynesia," I agreed, frowning slightly. "If he were reminded of one of those by something he read, and took it into his head to declare they didn't exist, there's no telling what might happen. The sudden disappearance of any one of them—why, tidal waves and earthquakes would be the least we could expect."

"But what can we do to stop him?" Aunt Edith wanted to know, desperately. "We can't tell him that—"

She was interrupted by a snort from Uncle Otis himself as he marched into the kitchen with the evening paper.

"Listen to this!" he commanded, and read us a short item, the gist of which was that Seth Youngman, the second cousin who had lawsuited his hill away from him, was planning to sell Marble Hill to a New York company that would quarry it. Then Uncle Otis threw the paper down on the kitchen table in disgust.

"What they talking about?" he barked, his eyebrows bristling. "Marble Hill? No hill around here by that name, and never has been. And Seth Youngman never owned a hill in his life. What kind of idiots get this paper out, I want to know?"

He glowered at us. And in the silence, a faint distant rumbling, as of displaced stones rolling, could be heard. Aunt Edith and I turned as one. It was still faintly light, and from the kitchen window he could see to the northwest, where Marble Hill stood up against the horizon like a battered derby hat—or where it had stood. For when we turned, it was no longer there.

The ancient prophets may have had faith strong enough to move mountains. But Uncle Otis was possessed of something far more remarkable, it seemed—a lack of faith which could unmove them.

UNCLE OTIS himself, unaware of anything unusual, picked up the paper again, grumbling.

"Everybody's crazy these days," he declared. "Piece here about President Roosevelt. Not Teddy Roosevelt, but somebody called Franklin. Everybody knows perfectly well there's on such a president as Franklin Roo—"

"Uncle Otis!" I cried out wildly. "Look, there's a mouse!"

Uncle Otis stopped and turned. There *was* a mouse, crouched under the stove, and it was the only thing I could think of to distract Uncle Otis' attention before he expressed his disbelief in Franklin D. Roosevelt. As it was, I was just barely in time. I dabbed at my brow. Uncle Otis was scowling.

"Where?" he demanded. "No mouse I can see!"

"Th—" I started to point. Then I checked myself. As soon as he had spoken, of course, the mouse was gone. I said instead that I must have been mistaken. Uncle Otis snorted and strode back toward the parlor. Aunt Edith and I looked at each other.

"If he'd said—" she began, "if he'd finished saying that there isn't any President Roosevelt—"

She never completed her own sentence. Uncle Otis, going through the doorway, at that instant caught his foot in a hole worn through the linoleum and fell full length into the hall. As he went down, his head struck a small table, and he was unconscious when we reached him.

This new emergency occupied our attention for some minutes. I carried Uncle Otis into the parlor and laid him on the old horsehair sofa. Aunt Edith brought a cold compress and spirits of ammonia. Together we worked over Uncle Otis' limp form, and presently he opened his eyes, blinking at us without recognition.

"Who're you?" he demanded. "What happened to me?"

"Otis!" Aunt Edith cried. "I'm your sister. You fell and hit your head. You've been unconscious."

Uncle Otis glowered at us with deep suspicion. "Otis?" he repeated. "My name's not Otis. Who you think I am, anyway?"

"But it *is* Otis!" Aunt Edith wailed. "You're Otis Morks, my brother, and you live in Hillport, Vermont. You've lived here all your life!"

Uncle Otis' lower lip stuck out obstinately.

"My name's *not* Otis Morks!" he declared, getting up. "I'm Eustace Lingham, of Cleveland, Ohio. I sell farm machinery. I'm not your brother. I've never seen you before, either of you. I've got a headache, and I'm tired of talking. I'm going out and get some fresh air. Maybe it'll make my head feel better."

DUMBLY Aunt Edith stood to one side. Uncle Otis marched out into the hall and through the front door. Aunt Edith, peering out the window, reported that he was standing on the front steps, looking at the stars.

"It's happened again," she said despairingly. "His amnesia's come back. Just like the time twenty years ago when he fell off a horse and thought he was this Eustace Lingham from Cleveland for a whole week. Nothing anybody could say would make him believe different.

"Oh, Murchison, now we've got to call the doctor. But

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if the doctor finds out about the other, he'll want to shut him up. Only, if anybody tries to shut Otis up, he'll just disbelieve in them, and the place they want to shut him up in, too. Then they—they—"

"But if something isn't done," I pointed out, "there's no telling what may happen. He's bound to read President Roosevelt's name again. You can't miss it these days, even in Vermont. Or else he'll come across a mention of Madagascar or Guatemala."

"Or get into a fuss with the income tax people," Aunt Edith put in. "He keeps getting letters from them about why he's never paid any income tax. The last letter, they said they were going to send somebody to call on him in person. But he says there isn't any such thing as an income tax, so there can't be any income tax collectors. So if a man comes here saying he's an income tax collector, Uncle Otis will just not believe him. Then—"

Helpless, we looked at each other. Then Aunt Edith grabbed my arm.

"Murchison!" she gasped. "Quick! Go out with him! We mustn't leave him alone. Only last week he decided that *there aren't any such things as stars!*"

I did not hesitate an instant. A moment later I was on the porch beside Uncle Otis, who was breathing in the cool, fresh evening air and staring upward at the spangled heavens, a look of deepest disbelief on his face.

"Stars!" he barked, stabbing a skinny forefinger toward the star-dotted sky. "A hundred million billion trillion dillion miles away, every last one of 'em! And every one of 'em a hundred times bigger'n the sun! That's what the book said. You know what I say? I say bah! Nothing's that big, or that far off. You know what those things they look at through telescopes and call stars are? They're not stars at all. Fact is, there's no such things as st—"

"Uncle Otis!" I cried loudly. "Look out, a mosquito!"

And I brought my hand down on the top of his head with solid force.

I had to distract him. I had to keep him from saying it. The universe is a big thing, of course, and probably was too big even for Uncle Otis to disbelieve it into not being. But I couldn't take any chances. I didn't dare. So I yelled and slapped him.

I'd forgotten, though, about the return of his ancient amnesia, and his belief that he was Eustace Lingham of Cleveland. When he had recovered, he stared at me coldly.

"I'm not your Uncle Otis!" he stated. "I'm nobody's Uncle Otis! I'm nobody's brother, either. I'm Eustace Lingham, and I've got a headache! I'm going to have my cigar, and I'm going to bed, and in the morning I'm going back to Cleveland, where I come from!"

And he turned, stamped inside, and went up the stairs.

I trailed after him, unable for once to think of a helpful plan, and Aunt Edith followed us both up the stairs. She and I came to a stop at the top. Together we watched Uncle Otis stride into his room, close the door, and heard him slide the bolt to.

After that we heard the bedsprings squeak, as he sat down upon the bed. This was followed by the scratching of a match, and in a moment we smelled cigar smoke. Uncle Otis always allowed himself one cigar, just before going to bed.

"Otis Morks!" we heard him mutter to himself, and one shoe dropped to the floor. "Nobody's got such a name. It's a trick of some kind. Don't believe there is any such person."

Then he was silent. Aunt Edith gripped my arm. "Perhaps," she said hopefully, "perhaps tomorrow it will have worn off."

But we both knew she didn't really believe it. Uncle Otis' strange obstinacy wouldn't wear off tomorrow, or next week. It was permanent. And the reason we couldn't think of anything to do was because there wasn't anything to do. Nothing could help matters, short of outright murder. And that, of course, we couldn't bring ourselves to. All we could do was to wait. And the next day, or the day after that, or the day after that at the latest, disaster in some form was bound to strike. And we were helpless to prevent it. Utterly helpless.

• • •

"HAAH!" At this point in Morks' narration Fowler interrupted with a triumphant snort. "But nothing did happen!" he exclaimed. "Explain that, if you can! And don't try to say that your Uncle Otis conveniently died before his obstinacy could bring about any disasters."

Morks shook his head. "No, he didn't die," he said.

"Then he's still alive?" Fowler demanded.

Morks shook his head again. "No," he said sadly, "I don't think you could say he's still alive either. As to the reason why no disaster did occur . . . Well, you see, Aunt Edith and I were standing there, in despair, when all of a sudden we both realized we hadn't heard Uncle Otis drop his other shoe. And in that moment we knew what had happened.

"Together we rushed to Uncle Otis' door. It was bolted, but we forced it open, and caught ourselves just inside the room.

"Aunt Edith and I stared around then. The window was closed and locked. A cigar in an ash tray on a table by Uncle Otis' bed was sending a feather of smoke upward. There was a hollow in the bed covers, where someone might have been sitting a second or two earlier. A single one of Uncle Otis' shoes lay on the floor beside the bed.

"But Uncle Otis' last words—we could hear them ringing clearly in our ears still—had been to the effect that he didn't really believe there *was* any such person as Otis Morks. And Uncle Otis"—Morks stared away through the windows, upon his face an expression of deep melancholy—"Uncle Otis was gone."

He sighed, gently. Then he lifted the copy of the *Times*, which somehow had become transferred from Fowler to himself during the narrative, and began to read.

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Men for the Flag

The prisoners furiously charged the British officers

There was only a handful of them, gaunt, ragged men; but they had a ship and a homemade banner, and they had heard the Liberty Bell's first ringing. And one of them was filled with magic strength from Odin's Cup

By Philip Ketchum

Author of "Rendezvous for Rogues," "Gallows Clan," etc.

I

AT TIMES the wound in his side was so painful that it seemed to engulf his whole body and paralyze his mind. Usually, on those occasions, he finally slipped away into the oblivion of unconsciousness, and awoke weaker than he had been before.

All of his mother's cheerfulness and her carefully thought up falsehoods couldn't deceive him on that score. He was dying and he knew it and the only thing that he couldn't understand was why dying should take so long and why it had to be so painful. It would have been much better, he felt, if the bullet that had struck him down on the Gowanus Road had finished him. He then would have been spared not only this physical torture, but the bitter knowledge of defeat, as well.

The door to his room opened and Mary Carver came in. She flashed him a swift, guarded glance, and seemed startled to find him awake. For just an instant she hesitated, then she nodded to him and said: "I—I thought I'd close your window, Captain Macdougal. It's going to be quite chilly tonight."

John Macdougal watched her cross the room and close the window. She was a tall girl and slender, and didn't look overly strong, yet when he had stumbled back here after the rout of Washington's army, it had been Mary Carver who had carried him up to this room.

She was an indentured servant to his father and Macdougal suddenly wondered what her status would be now, since the British had taken New York City and since his father was a well-known rebel.

Mary turned from the window and crossed over to the bed. Her eyes were a sober gray; she had a nice mouth and chin, and it struck Macdougal quite suddenly that he had never noticed these things before. But it wasn't so strange at that. He hadn't been home much during the past year. Until only a few months ago his command had been near Boston where they had held Lord Howe hemmed in and unable to take any action against the rebellious thirteen colonies.

"Can I get you anything, Captain Macdougal?" Mary asked. "A cool drink of water or—"

Macdougal shook his head. "What of Washington and

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the army? Where are they; what are they doing now?"

"It is said that they are still holding out at Harlem Heights."

"They can't stay there. Lord Howe will flank them in a drive to the north. Why haven't they withdrawn to New Jersey?"

"If General Washington is as wise a man as you say," Mary returned, "he will guard against that."

MACDOUGAL closed his eyes. It mattered little now what happened, he decided. All was lost anyhow. With the Declaration of Independence scarcely two months old, the rebellion was already broken. They had had a long time to prepare for the British attack on New York City.

They had contrived a cunning system of defenses, yet within a few days after the British had disembarked at Gravesend Bay on Long Island, the rebel forces had been beaten and the city had been occupied. Thousands of Washington's men, too, had been taken prisoner. Those left to him at Harlem Heights couldn't be very many. Without any doubt, this defeat in New York marked the beginning of the end of the rebellion.

"Here, Captain Macdougal," said Mary Carver. "Try this."

Macdougal opened his eyes. While his mind had been reviewing the tragic events of the past few days, Mary had slipped out of the room and had returned with a glass of water. She slipped an arm under his wide shoulders and half-lifted him from the bed, holding the glass to his lips. He drank, and then lay back exhausted even from that little effort.

Mary set down the glass. She went to the door, opened it and looked out in the hall and then closed it again and came back to the bed. Her eyes met his squarely and Macdougal saw that the girl was frowning and that her lips had tightened.

"So you've given up, have you?" she said suddenly. "Just because you've lost one battle, just because you have the scratch of a wound in your side, you've decided that this liberty you thought so much of isn't worth fighting for any more."

Macdougal blinked, not sure at first that he had heard correctly. He said, "Mary, you—"

"Just a minute, Captain Macdougal," said Mary Carver. "I've wanted to say this for several days and I've started now and I'm going to finish. It's a fine, proud thing to talk of liberty when you're surrounded by people who feel the way you do, and when the bands are playing, and when everything's going just fine.

"Yes, it's a grand thing to raise a Liberty Pole and to wear a uniform and march at the head of your men. I once was proud of you. I once thought you meant all you said. I didn't know you would give up so easily."

The girl paused. She was breathing heavily and there were spots of color in her cheeks. Macdougal stared at her, too amazed to say a word. He couldn't believe that this was Mary Carver. Mary Carver who was so quiet, so completely self-effacing.

"I know what you are thinking," Mary said. "You are thinking that I am only a servant girl and that I have no right to speak to you this way. Perhaps I haven't. I am only a servant girl, but do you know why?

"I wanted to come to a country where I would have a chance to amount to something and I didn't have money for my passage. The only way I could come was by signing indenture papers and agreeing to work out my passage money after I got here.

"I've worked two years to pay off that debt and it will be three more before I am free. Five years in all. Five years of slavery is the price for my freedom and I don't regret it. You've had one defeat, and you've given up."

A faint anger stirred in Macdougal, but it quickly burned out. He closed his eyes, relaxed.

Mary leaned closer and when she spoke again her voice sounded more intense. "Maybe you think you're dying, Captain Macdougal. And I suppose you can die if you haven't the will to live. It's easy to die.

"It's much harder to live and to fight on when everything seems blackest, but there are men in this country who will do just that. There are some men who will never give up, even from their graves. Those men believe in liberty. Believe in fighting for it, not dying for it. And I thought you were one of them."

Macdougal moved restlessly in his bed, and sharp, stabbing pains from his wound spread throughout his body. He opened his eyes and stared at Mary Carver. There were tears on her cheeks and it seemed to him that she looked frightened.

He said, "Mary, I—" And then he broke off, for Mary had turned suddenly away and was stumbling toward the door.

THE room was very still after Mary had gone. John Macdougal stared at the gray square of the window. Night was coming and already the shadows were beginning to thicken.

Soon, he knew, his mother would be here with his supper, a bowl of broth and milk. Then after she had gone there would be the night and the torture of the memories it would bring, ghosts of shattered dreams parading through his mind.

Mary just didn't understand. They hadn't suffered only a minor defeat here in New York. Their army had been completely broken. Only a few thousand had escaped and he knew how completely demoralized those few thousand were. You couldn't fight the British without an army, and no other army could be raised in its place after this defeat in New York.

And yet, even with that realization, Macdougal was aware of a strange restlessness which he hadn't known before tonight. His thoughts kept turning back to what Mary had said. There wasn't a chance, of course, but supposing that Washington could escape from Harlem Heights. Supposing that more men could be raised to replace those who had been killed in the defense of New York, or who had been taken prisoner. Suppose . . .

The sound of heavy voices from downstairs broke in on Macdougal's thoughts. They were men's voices and they seemed sharp and angry. Macdougal thought that he heard mention of his name, and it came to him suddenly that the British must be searching the town and that they had come here. He should have expected that. Of course, having taken the town, they would search out such rebels as still remained hidden in it.

He threw back the covers of his bed and sat up, closing his eyes against the sudden dizziness that swept over him and gritting his teeth against the pain in his body. A sharp anxiety for his mother brought him to his feet, and he moved unsteadily across the room, opened the door and stepped out into the hall. It was only a little way to the stairs; he reached them and went down, holding tightly to the bannister for support.

The voices came from the front room and as Macdougal came to the foot of the stairs he heard someone saying: "We have information that he is here, and I have orders to search the house. I assure you that he will not be harmed if he submits under the terms of Lord Howe's pardon and takes an oath of allegiance to the King."

Macdougal crossed over to the door to the front room and pushed it open. He heard a gasp of astonishment from his mother and another from Mary Carver. Then

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almost at once his mother was at his side and had slipped an arm around him and was crying that he shouldn't have come down.

John Macdougal had no conception of how he looked when he stepped into that room. He was tall and his muslin nightgown reached barely to his knees. His wound had started bleeding again and there was a spreading red stain on his right side. His face was pale and hollow-cheeked and a two weeks' growth of reddish whiskers covered his jaw and chin.

THERE were four British soldiers and two officers in the room. Without an order the soldiers had covered him with their muskets. Macdougal paid no attention to them, however, nor did he more than glance at the older of the two officers.

His eyes centered on the other man, a thin, tall man of about his own age. This was Aaron Cathcart and the last time Macdougal had seen him he had been wearing the uniform of an officer in Washington's army. Macdougal had never liked Cathart, had never thought him sincere. Here now was proof that he hadn't been.

"So you've changed coats," Macdougal said flatly. "Or perhaps all along you were a British spy."

Cathcart flushed. He had sharp, irregular features, thin, bloodless lips.

"Captain Macdougal?" asked the other officer, "lately of the rabble which defied the King?"

"An officer in the army of the thirteen independent colonies," Macdougal said coldly.

"Read him Lord Howe's proclamation," Cathcart suggested.

The older officer drew a copy of the proclamation from his pocket and read it. The proclamation offered a pardon to all rebels who would renounce their cause and pledge allegiance to the King.

Macdougal listened, making a grim effort to hold himself erect. He had no feeling at all in his legs and he was finding it increasingly hard to keep his head clear. How long he could go on standing he didn't know. In spite of the candles in the room, it seemed to be growing much darker.

"Your decision, Macdougal?" Cathcart asked dryly.

The tone of the man's voice, its mockery and triumph, were like a cut in the face. Macdougal stiffened. His eyes circled the room and fell on a carafe of Madeira on the sideboard.

"A toast," he said slowly, and his words were a little thick. "That's it. I should like to offer a toast. Mary, furnish the gentlemen glasses and pour them wine."

All this time Mary Carver had been standing motionless, staring at him wide-eyed.

"Glasses and wine, Mary," Macdougal repeated.

The older officer started to object but Cathcart stopped him. There was a thin smile on Cathcart's lips, almost as if he had guessed what toast Macdougal was going to offer. The man hated him, Macdougal realized. Had hated him for a long time. Looking back now, he could see that quite clearly, could recall a dozen instances that would bear it out.

Mary carried a glass to each of the two officers and then turned to Macdougal. But she brought him no glass. Instead, she placed in his hand an old drinking horn which she had taken from one of the drawers of the sideboard, a drinking horn which had been his father's and which had been in the Macdougal family for many generations.

The sight of it brought Macdougal a mild surprise for he hadn't thought of this old drinking horn for years. Once, as a child, his father had caught him with it and had taken it away from him, angrily, and had ordered him never to touch it again. Later he had heard the story of the old drinking horn, a fantastic story to which there couldn't be any truth. As Macdougal took the horn from Mary's hand he thought suddenly that she, too, must have heard the story and must have believed in it. That was why she had brought the horn to him.

WHILE Mary returned to the sideboard for the carafe of wine, Macdougal stared at the drinking horn. It was of bluish metal and was fastened to a wooden base. On the metal there were strange engravings which held no meaning for him.

"No, not from that cup, John," whispered his mother. "Not from that cup."

She sounded frightened and Macdougal glanced around at her, surprised. He had never thought that his mother had been much impressed by the story of the old drinking horn.

Macdougal smiled. "Why not, Mother? Why—?"

He had lifted the drinking horn closer to his lips, and now he saw that it was filled almost to the brim with a bubbling liquid. Macdougal stared at it in amazement. He was sure that the drinking horn had been empty when Mary had brought it to him.

Now he listened.

"Wait, John Macdougal," said a voice in his ear, a quiet voice, yet clear and commanding. *"Wait, John Macdougal. Think well before ye drink!"*

At the sound of that voice, Macdougal's hand trembled and some of the liquid in the drinking horn spilled over his wrist. He stared around at his mother. There were tears in her eyes and she was biting her lips.

He thought surely that it must have been her voice he had just heard; but now he saw that her lips weren't moving, and he heard the voice again. It was louder this time. It seemed to fill the entire room and there was a background to it, a background of weird, stirring music, and the words he heard came to him in the tempo of a chant.

Accursed is he who drinks from Odin's cup,
Who steals the strength and wisdom of the gods,
For by fair Asgard, this shall be his lot,
To cherish freedom, but to know it not,
To search for peace, yet ever live in strife,
Companion to sorrow and to death, through life.

The voice ceased and the background of sound gradually faded out. A heavy silence seemed to have fallen over the room. Macdougal shook his head as though to throw off a spell. He stared across the room. Mary had finished filling the glasses of the two officers and was now approaching him. At the sight of the filled drinking horn she caught her breath.

"Your toast, Captain Macdougal?" Cathcart prompted sarcastically.

John Macdougal nodded. He recalled the warning he had just heard and laughed. "Aye, my toast," he cried, and his voice was sure and strong. "Gentlemen, I give you—*Liberty!*"

As he spoke, Macdougal lifted the drinking horn to his lips, threw back his head, and drained it. The liquid was sweet and thick and strangely warming. It carried a glow to every part of his body, deadening the pain of his wound, clearing his head, strengthening his muscles. He straightened his shoulders and was unconscious of the movement. He stood more erect, hardly aware that he was leaning no more on his mother.

Neither Cathcart nor the other officer had touched the wine in their glasses. Cathcart's thin smile was still on his lips.

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"You will come with us, Macdougal," he said quietly. "You have made your choice."

John Macdougal lifted a hand to his side. His wound had stopped bleeding. He felt it and it seemed almost well. His eyes went to Mary Carver. The girl held one hand at her throat. She looked more frightened than she had in his room after she had finished denouncing him.

"It's all right, Mary," he told her. "Bring me my clothes. And while I'm gone, hold fast to your belief in the things you said to me a little while ago."

Mary left the room and John Macdougal's mother drew a little aside and looked at him and then looked down at the drinking horn which he still held in his hand. The sight of it seemed to fascinate her.

"Odin's cup," she said under her breath. "All that I have heard of it is true. And my son drank of it. He—"

Macdougal handed his mother the drinking horn. "They'll not keep me in prison, mother," he said slowly. "I'll get away and rejoin the army. For the army is not lost and Washington will not be trapped on Harlem Heights. The cause of liberty is not dead. It will never die."

All that he had said was as clear and certain to him as though he were referring to the past. There were no longer any doubts in his mind. He felt strong and eager to face what lay ahead, no matter how hard the road might be.

II

THE prison was dark and foul and was so jammed with men that there was not room for all of them to stretch out at night. They had no beds or chairs or benches. On the floor was a thin covering of vermin-infested straw.

Each morning it was the first task of the prisoners to pile against the door the bodies of those who had died during the night. Usually there were a half-dozen or more. Men didn't live long in these British prisons.

After the removal of the dead the prisoners received their daily food rations of beef, or pork and biscuits. Often the food served to them was spoiled or wormy.

There were a score of prisons in New York City similar to this one to which Macdougal had been taken. Each had its daily quota of dead, each had its guards at all doors. John Macdougal was surprised that so few died when so many seemed so near to death. He was strengthened by the courage of his fellow prisoners.

One man in particular he would never forget. He had been carried into the prison almost dead of a wound in the stomach. He must have been in terrible agony through all the days that he lived, yet never once did he complain or cry out. The doubts of others he answered with an assurance that their cause was not lost, and nothing could shake him in that faith.

Macdougal was sitting by the man on the night that he died. During the cold, restless hours before midnight the man called him by name and said, "Washington has withdrawn from Harlem Heights. The British have not trapped him."

Macdougal nodded. "That is true," he answered almost without thought. "And Washington has faced Howe's men at White Plains and has given the British a taste of Yankee courage."

"What's that, Macdougal?" someone called sharply. "Where did you hear that?"

John Macdougal had no answer ready. He hadn't heard such a story anywhere. By the last report which had come to him from one of the newer prisoners, Washington was still on Harlem Heights. Yet he had a feeling that what he had said was true.

"What's this about a battle at White Plains?" asked another voice.

"Washington withdrew from Harlem Heights when Howe tried to encircle him," Macdougal said slowly. "At White Plains their two forces came together. In the face of a superior number of men, Washington was again forced to withdraw, but before he did he left his mark on the British. And his army is still intact."

A rather heated discussion followed that statement, and more men demanded the source of Macdougal's information, without drawing any response from him. Macdougal sat quietly on the floor, searching for an answer in his own mind.

He slipped a hand under his shirt and felt of the wound in his side. It was completely healed. He couldn't understand how he had known about that battle at White Plains, why his wound had healed so swiftly, or why, in this prison where all men seemed to grow weaker with each passing day, he should show no sign of distress.

A shudder passed over the figure on the floor at Macdougal's side and a hand reached out and clasped tightly on his. "It has not been in vain," whispered the man's voice. "I see it ahead. Victory for the colonies. Freedom for all."

Those nearer the two of them grew silent and somewhere a man mumbled a prayer. Here was death striking again in the prison, yet the last words of the dying man seemed to lift Macdougal up on the wings of prophecy.

IT WAS two days before word of Washington's withdrawal from Harlem Heights and news of the battle at White Plains seeped into the prison, yet when the story was finally brought to them by a new prisoner, it was substantially as Macdougal had told it.

This frightened Macdougal a little. It reminded him of that warning voice which had sounded in his ears before he had taken the drink from Odin's cup. His vigor of body and his strange, clairvoyant knowledge of Washington's withdrawal were somehow connected with the ancient cup.

Winter had come and the prison was poorly heated. Pneumonia laid its heavy hand on many of the prisoners, and each morning there was a greater pile of bodies for the dead wagon. Macdougal suffered with the others from cold and hunger, yet the sickness did not touch him.

He was seated in the far corner of their wide prison room on Christmas night. The talk of the men near him turned to home and to other Christmas celebrations. Macdougal listened, smiling at some of the stories.

Suddenly one of the men turned to him and said, "Mac, where'd you like to be this Christmas if you could walk right out of here?"

"Where would I like to be?" Macdougal repeated. "Why, with Washington."

He was surprised at his own answer. It had been given without conscious thought. It had just seemed the thing to say and as he puzzled over that an explanation of his answer came to him.

"I'd like to be with Washington," he went on, "because tonight, Christmas night, 1776, General Washington has crossed the Delaware and surprised the Hessian soldiers at Trenton. He's given the enemy a Christmas present they'll remember for a long time."

A sharp silence followed that statement, then someone laughed a little nervously and said: "What do you mean by that, Macdougal? What are you trying to tell us?"

Macdougal bit his lips. He couldn't explain what he had just said, yet he knew the story to be the truth. It hadn't come to him as any vision or in a dream. The knowledge of what was happening tonight had just suddenly become a part of the things he knew.

"Now I'll tell a fairy story." Someone laughed. "Once upon a time there was a beautiful princess . . ."

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A WEEK later the prisoners heard the full story of Washington's defeat of the Hessian soldiers at Trenton, and from that time on Macdougal was a marked man. Some of them regarded him suspiciously, avoided all contact with him. Others bothered him with innumerable questions.

They wanted to know what Washington was doing now, how things were going at home, when the war would be over. Those who were sick or dying asked him to sit with them. Scores gave him messages to be sent to loved ones or friends and it was remarked by everyone that Macdougal never refused to accept those messages, never suggested that he might not be able to deliver them.

The bitter months of the winter slipped past and summer came. Then on an early fall morning one of the newer prisoners, a boy still in his teens, ill and homesick and bitter in his captivity, suddenly went mad. He threw himself wildly against the steel barred door of their prison, screaming at the guards, begging them to let him out.

Macdougal hurried over to the boy and caught him in his arms and carried him back across the room. At the touch of Macdougal's hands, all of the fight went out of the lad and he started to sob, brokenly.

"I'll never get out of here. Never!" he cried. "I'll die just like the rest of you, and I don't want to die. I don't want to die."

Macdougal lowered the boy to the floor. "What is your name, son?"

"Tom Wade. I—"

"You'll not die, Tom," Macdougal said slowly. "You'll get out of here, tonight."

Tom Wade stopped his crying and stared up at Macdougal. Others nearby looked startled.

Macdougal smiled. He straightened, looked from side to side.

"Tonight," he went on, "just after dusk, the guard will come for me. It will seem that I am too ill to walk alone and I am certainly too dirty for the guard to touch. They will pick out two men to carry me to the guard room. You, Ben Mobridge. And you, Whit Anderson."

The two men Macdougal had named were tall, gaunt fellows and neither of them had been here long.

"I am being taken to the guard room," Macdougal went on, "for the purpose of identifying a man who has been taken and who is thought to be a spy. While we are there, Ben, Whit and I will take over the prison."

Macdougal's voice wasn't loud but it still reached to every corner of the room. Men crowded closer to him, completely silent, hanging on every word he said.

"We are needed at a point up the Hudson River," Macdougal continued. "A British army from Canada is soon to march this way and another army will start up the Hudson to meet them. It is the British plan to cut the colonies in two by gaining command of the Hudson. That plan must be defeated. How many of you here will follow me up the Hudson?"

A moment of silence followed that question. Then from somewhere in the crowd a man's voice said, "I guess, Captain Macdougal, that we'd follow you to hell an' back if you could get us out of here."

A murmur of agreement ran over the crowd. They pushed still closer.

"That is settled then." Macdougal nodded. "I want now a score of men who will volunteer to help the sick and wounded when we make our escape. I want to name others as leaders. I want to divide you all in squads. Each of us has a part in the work which lies ahead and I expect each of you to do his part."

Not a man there seemed to question the things Macdougal had said. There was an assurance in his voice which carried conviction. Even the men who had been suspicious of him volunteered eagerly now, for they could see that they had everything to gain if Macdougal's plan worked. And if it didn't what had they to lose?

During the remainder of that day, John Macdougal went quietly about the work of organizing the men in the prison. He did not try to understand how he had known he would be sent for that evening, nor did he think back over the other plans he had considered for making his escape.

A hundred possible schemes had occurred to him since he had been here, yet something had held him back. He knew now what it was. Until tonight the time for his escape hadn't come. Some destiny which he didn't understand was controlling him, guiding his movements. There was nothing for him to do but follow it.

DARKNESS came early that night, and with it a cold, bitter wind. The men in the prison room crouched together for warmth, but none of them thought of sleep. They kept watching the door, listening for the hammering footsteps of the guard.

The footsteps came at last. Lantern light showed at the barred door and half a score of armed soldiers appeared outside, their muskets ready for instant use.

The officer in charge of the guard, a short, fat, beefy-faced man, presented himself at the door and called, "Captain John Macdougal, step forward."

Macdougal lay on his back a few feet from the door. He didn't move.

"Captain Macdougal!" called the officer again.

Ben Mobridge stepped forward. "Macdougal's too sick to move," he said flatly. "You'll have to carry him. He's just inside the door here."

The officer scowled. He pointed at Mobridge and then at Whit Anderson, who stood a little distance away. "You two pick him up and bring him along," he ordered. "I don't care how sick he is, he's wanted in the guard house."

"Just like Macdougal said," one of the prisoners breathed. "We're going to get out of here. We're going to get out."

As Ben Mobridge and Whit Anderson stooped over Macdougal to lift him, he could sense their excitement. It was stirring in him, too. Just how they were going to take over command of this prison, he didn't know. None of the details was clear to him. The guard room, he knew, was in the front of the prison and the men on duty there wouldn't be taking any chances. He and these two companions of his would be closely watched.

The prison door was unlocked and Mobridge and Anderson carried him into the hall. The soldiers closed in around them. It was only a short distance to the guard room.

"Carry him inside and drop him on the floor," the officer ordered Mobridge and Anderson. "Then stand by to carry him back."

Someone opened the door to the guard room and the two men carried Macdougal inside and lowered him to the floor.

It was warm in here. A stove in the corner of the room glowed red hot and on it a tea kettle simmered. Macdougal sat up and held his hands out toward the stove.

"Macdougal, get to your feet!"

The voice was sharp and there was something familiar in it. Macdougal glanced around. In front of a table at one side of the room stood Aaron Cathcart. He had put on weight since Macdougal had last seen him; his stomach was beginning to jut out and his neck had thickened.

"Get to your feet, Macdougal," Cathcart ordered again.

John Macdougal stood up, his eyes circling the room. There were half a dozen soldiers here and two officers besides Cathcart. One of them was the provost-marshal of

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the city, a man named Cunningham. He was in charge of all the prisons, and his cruelties were to become a matter of legend. The third officer was the man commanding this particular prison.

One other man was in the room, an elderly man, broad of shoulder but stooped and haggard. He wore no uniform. His clothing was tattered and old and around his head was a bloody bandage.

Macdougal caught his breath. This man must be the suspected spy he had been brought here to identify. But he hadn't guessed who the man would be. It hadn't occurred to him even to wonder. His eyes fastened on the man and couldn't turn away. He knew him. The suspected spy was Major Alan Macdougal, his father.

"I SEE you recognize the man I brought here," Cathcart remarked. "Perhaps you would even like to talk to him for a while. Go ahead. This should be quite touching."

Macdougal jerked his eyes away from his father's face and he took a step toward Cathcart, a sudden, hot anger sweeping over him.

"Keep back, Macdougal," said Cathcart sharply. "Guards! Watch this man!"

Cunningham laughed shortly. "Let him start something. I'll show him how to finish it."

Macdougal sucked in a long, slow breath. He glanced around at Mobridge and Anderson. They had backed toward the wall, each near one of the guards. Their bodies were tense. Macdougal knew that they were awaiting a signal from him. They were ready to risk death.

"Your recognition of your father is all that we require," Cathcart said. "I had never seen him before and though he was taken at your home, I couldn't sure that he was Major Alan Macdougal."

"I have not said that I recognized him," Macdougal snapped.

"But you do."

Macdougal's father thus far had not uttered a word; but now he straightened a little, smiled, and said: "Why deny it, John? I knew that something like this might happen when I volunteeered to come here. But I have succeeded in what I set out to do. The word I came to get has already been dispatched to General Gates."

Cathcart spat out an oath. "How did you send it?" he shouted. "Tell me that. How did you send it?"

The older Macdougal shrugged and glanced over at his son. "Don't think that they shall hang me, John," he said quietly. "I have chosen a soldier's death. Like this—"

Even as he was speaking he lunged toward Cathcart, striking out with his fist. The blow lifted Cathcart to his toes and sent him staggering backward across the room. Cunningham yelled at the guards, and a spattering of musket fire crashed across the room.

Macdougal's father, who had turned to charge the guards after striking Cathcart, seemed unharmed by the shots. Reaching one of the guards, he tore a musket from the man's hand and smashed him over the head with it. He struck out at another and another.

In the moment of his father's lunge at Cathcart, Macdougal had thrown himself on Cunningham. The provost-marshal's orders to the guard were suddenly cut off as he went down under the hammering blows of Macdougal's fists. The other officer had clawed out his pistol, but the weapon wasn't primed and he had no chance to make it ready. Macdougal tore the weapon from his hand and smashed the pistol barrel across his eyes. He hit him again and the man fell back across the table and then rolled to the floor.

Near the door Anderson and Mobridge had closed in on the last two guards. The others were already down. The two prisoners made short work of finishing their job. A clubbed musket cracked open the head of one of the guards. The other man dropped to his knees and screamed for mercy, and then a gun-butt silenced him.

Macdougal saw his father lying motionless on the floor. He hurried to him, dropped to his knees and rolled his father over. There was no sign of life in the older man's wide-open eyes. The front of his shirt was stained with blood from half a dozen wounds.

Something that Mary Carver had said to him came back to Macdougal in that moment. Mary had said that some men would fight for liberty even from the grave. His father had done that. He had received these wounds when he charged across the room, but he had fought on; for a few moments his spirit had been stronger than death.

A hand touched Macdougal on the shoulder and he looked up.

"We've done it, Captain," said Dan Mobridge. "We've taken the prison."

Macdougal wiped a hand across his eyes. Yes, they had taken the prison, but at a price he had never thought to pay. At the price of his father's life.

"What next?" asked Mobridge.

John Macdougal stood up. "Bind these guards and the British officers," he ordered. "Then find the keys to the prison doors. Unlock them. Order each squad leader to be ready to march. We have little time."

III

THE squads were formed and the captives marched from the prison. In reports given later it was said that they fled in disorder, and their outrages in the city were described. But there was no truth in that. Each squad leader as he passed the guard room was given a few words of instruction by John Macdougal, and each man obeyed his orders.

Macdougal had chosen as leaders men who knew New York City, and by a different route he directed each of the squads to the foot of Liberty Street and to the docks along the North River. At last he followed them, carrying his father's body in his arms and accompanied by Ben Mobridge and Whit Anderson.

The cold wind whistling in from the north carried with it the promise of snow, and it had driven most people from the streets. There was no moon to thin out the shadows of the night. Macdougal doubted that their escape from the prison had been noted. He turned toward his home, walking swiftly, dreading the moments ahead of him.

He had hoped that Mary Carver would answer his knock, but it was his mother who opened the door. When she saw the figure in his arms, her body stiffened and a sharp cry rose from her throat. For an instant Macdougal was afraid that she was going to drop to the floor in a faint. But even as he called to the two men who had followed him here, his mother steadied herself.

"Bring him in, John," she whispered. "I—I was afraid of this. When those men took him away I was afraid—"

John Macdougal carried his father into the front room and lowered the body to a couch. He stood up and moved away and watched his mother drop to her knees at his father's side. He couldn't see his mother's face, but he knew the look that would be there.

"He was killed at the prison," he said slowly. "But for what he did I would still be there."

The kneeling woman made no answer.

"Where's Mary Carver?" Macdougal asked.

"She left the house just before your father was taken. He knew that the British were after him. There were

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some important papers he had to deliver. So Mary—"

"She undertook to deliver them to General Gates?"

Macdougal's mother nodded. "It's not hard for a woman to slip through the British lines. She offered to go. The information in the papers was important."

John Macdougal wasn't greatly surprised. It was like Mary Carver to volunteer for a task like that.

His mother stood up and looked around at him. Her face was very pale and there were tears in her eyes. "You mustn't stay here John," she said swiftly. "As soon as it is found that you have escaped, men will be sent out to search for you and this is the first place they will come. You must get away."

Macdougal took a step forward. "Come with me, mother. There is no reason you should stay here."

"This is my home, John."

"I'll find another home for you."

"No."

There was finality in his mother's voice and John Macdougal knew that he couldn't shake her from the decision she had made. He stepped forward and took her in his arms and for a moment felt the weight of her body resting against him. Then she pushed him away, whispering: "Hurry, John. I couldn't bear it to lose you tonight, too." Macdougal swung around and stumbled toward the door, tears flooding his eyes and almost blinding him. He knew that his mother was right, and that he couldn't stay here. He had not only himself to think of; there were those men who had escaped with him and who would now be waiting for him at the docks on the North River.

The silence of the night was suddenly shattered by the booming of a gun from the direction of the battery. Macdougal stopped at the door. He looked around, whispered a word of farewell and then stepped outside.

Mobridge and Anderson were waiting for him, alert and tense.

"The prison break's been discovered," Mobridge said. "That was the warning gun."

Macdougal nodded. He said, "Come on," and started running toward Liberty Street.

THE escaped prisoners crouched in the shadows of a fire-gutted building on the waterfront. Out on the river, some distance from the shore, they could make out the masts of several ships. They were to escape that way.

Word had just been passed in a whisper from one man to another that they were to take over one of those ships just as they had taken over the prison. A score of small boats were tied to the dock and they would use those boats to reach the ship Macdougal had chosen as their prey.

"We haven't a chance," growled one of the men. "That cannon has warned everyone that some prisoners have escaped. The men on those boats will be watching for trouble. They're armed an' we're not. They'll let us get out there in the boats an' then open fire on us."

"We got out of the prison all right, didn't we?" someone answered.

"Sure. But this is different."

Another whisper ran down the line. One boat was going first. Everyone not in that boat was to wait five minutes, then was to follow. Squads were to stay together. In case there was any trouble the boats were to separate and try to make it across the river to the New Jersey shore.

John Macdougal faced the dozen men he had chosen to go with him in the first boat. "We'll row out there," he told them, "and if we're hailed, I'll do the talking. But once we're on board the ship, the time for talking will be over. A glance at us and they'll know who we are. I can give you no order but this. We must take the ship. That is our only chance of escape. We cannot, must not fail."

Mobridge, one of the dozen men, grinned and said to another: "I always did want to be a pirate. I guess this'll make me one, won't it?"

"If you live, Ben," the man answered.

Someone else chuckled. "He'll live. He's too ornery to die."

Macdougal smiled in the darkness. He liked these men. Their courage had been tried in the ordeal of prison and it hadn't been burned out.

A company of soldiers was moving down the street toward some other part of the waterfront. They moved at a trot and with hardly a glance to either side. Soon, Macdougal knew, this entire district would be alive with redcoats. They had to get out of here quickly.

As soon as the soldiers had passed Macdougal led his men to the dock. They climbed down into one of the largest of the small boats tied up there and six of the men caught up oars.

"Don't try to be too quiet," Macdougal ordered. "Row out boldly, as though you didn't care who heard you."

The men were not skillful with the oars. They splashed up a good deal of water. And as the boat neared the ship a sharp voice hailed them.

Macdougal stood up. He wasn't close enough to make out the name of the ship. "Is this the *North Star?*" he called.

"It's the *Truxtun,*" came the answer. "The *North Star* is in Wallaby Bay."

Macdougal laughed. "That's all right. I've a sealed message for the captain of the *Truxtun*, too. Lower your ship's ladder."

Whatever doubts the man on watch might have had were undoubtedly dispelled by Macdougal's boldness. The order was given to lower the ship's ladder, and Macdougal's boat slid in close to the dark hulk of the *Truxtun.*

Macdougal caught the rope ladder which had been lowered. He stared up toward the railing above. Several heads were outlined against the dark gray of the sky.

"When I get halfway up," whispered Macdougal, "I'll order you to follow. Don't waste any time."

Those in the boat nodded. Several of them, Macdougal noted, had brought along clubs which they must have picked up some time after leaving the prison.

MACDOUGAL started up the ladder. When part way to the deck he stopped, looked back and called, "Send those men up here, Corporal. The captain of the *Truxtun* will want to see them." Then, without another glance behind him, he continued on to the deck.

Several armed men on the watch, a few sailors and a short, heavy-set man who must have been the captain, were on hand to meet him. Two of the sailors held lanterns and the moment that his head appeared above the the rail and when the light fell on him, Macdougal could sense the alarm which gripped these men.

The short, heavy-set man took a step forward. "Who are you?" he grated. "Who—" And then he must have recognized the uniform Macdougal wore, even though it was torn and dirty and had lost all shape.

A sharp cry of warning rose to his lips. He turned and screamed an order at the guard.

Macdougal had said that there would be no time for talking once they were on board, and he was right. A musket ball tugged at the shoulder of his coat as he threw himself forward and another scratched his cheek. He plowed into two of the watch and carried them to the deck, rolled over and came to his feet, ducked under the slashing blow of a musket and caught the man who swung it around the waist. He lifted that man from the deck and hurled him at another of the armed men, rushed at

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the captain and caught his upraised arm in time to check the cut of his sword.

The captain was still screaming orders and men were rushing toward them from every quarter of the deck. But Macdougal's men were now clambering over the rail; they threw themselves into the fight with a reckless fury. They tore muskets from the hands of the watch, turned them into clubs and smashed men down.

Shoulder to shoulder they fought their way across the deck, driving the British back. Two of them reached the ladder that led below-deck and held back the seamen who had been off-watch. The rest, within a few minutes, broke all resistance on the deck. The captain and two more men dived overside. The others, who were still alive, begged for mercy.

John Macdougal lowered the musket he held. Its stock was smashed and its barrel was a twisted, useless piece of metal. He wiped a hand over his face, looked around at his men. Several of them were wounded; he saw three men slumped on the deck, either badly hurt or completely exhausted.

"Mobridge," Macdougal ordered, "see that these men who have surrendered are marched below and held there with the others. Then watch for the boats with our men. Have the boats tied up at the ladder. The British soldiers and seamen on board this ship will be sent ashore as soon as our men arrive."

Mobridge saluted. It was the first time Macdougal had been saluted since he had been wounded in the attack on New York City. "Yes sir," said Mobridge. "Any other orders, Captain?"

Macdougal shook his head. He turned and made his way to the bridge. A voice, hailing him from another ship nearby, asked him if he were in trouble and Macdougal called back that he wasn't.

"I'm taking on prisoners," he shouted. "They're making the *Truxtun* into a prison ship."

He tried to sound disgusted and probably he did, for his answer seemed to satisfy the other ship. It would explain why boats from the shore were approaching the *Truxtun,* should they be seen from the other ship.

The men from the shore arrived and under the direction of Mobridge the British soldiers and sailors were disarmed and sent down the ladder to the boats in which the prisoners had come.

"What now, sir?" asked Mobridge when that task was finished.

"Summon all among our men who have ever been seamen," Macdougal ordered. "Have them report to me. See that the others are armed. Check the provisions. Have someone prepare food. See that the ill and wounded are cared for."

Mobridge's hand again snapped up in a salute and he turned to obey those orders.

It was quite cold out there on the river. Macdougal pulled his thin coat tighter about him and stared to the north, toward the mouth of the Hudson River, his thoughts already leaping ahead. Tonight he had broken from prison, and with him almost a hundred and fifty men. They had slipped through the city to the harbor, had attacked and captured one of the British ships of the line. In a few moments, now, they would be slipping through the darkness toward the Hudson.

But not in a flight to freedom, for ahead of them, at no great distance, the British fleet of Sir Henry Clinton lay at anchor. If they sailed up the Hudson they would be sailing right into the arms of the expeditionary force which had put out from New York to effect a junction with Burgoyne and complete the operation of cutting the colonies in two.

Macdougal could see that clearly. He could see the thing that he had to do. Those among the escaped prisoners who had been seamen were assembled for Macdougal's orders. He gave them in a clear and confident voice. The *Truxtun* weighed anchor and her unfurled sails caught the wind. As silently as a ghost ship she got under way.

IV

WITHIN two hours, John Macdougal had the *Truxtun* put in near the shore and ordered the anchor dropped. He had had time to inspect the ship, to note its guns and ammunition and to gather some conception of the way it handled. Now, below-decks, he had called his men together for a brief conference.

In a few words Macdougal gave his men the picture as he saw it. "Burgoyne," he said, "with a strong British army is moving down the Hudson River valley from Canada. Ahead of us and up the Hudson, Sir Henry Clinton is leading a force to meet him. If these two armies meet and gain control of the valley, the colonies will be cut in two and the cause of freedom will be lost.

"Burgoyne has been stopped just this side of Saratoga by a colonial army under General Gates, but Clinton continues unopposed up the Hudson. He carries supplies and ammunition which Burgoyne needs badly. Someone must stop Clinton."

Macdougal paused, looking around at these men who faced him. A few were civilians who had been arrested and thrown into prison because of their leanings toward the rebel cause. Most of them, however, had been soldiers. Some were in dirty, soiled uniforms, but there wasn't a decent outfit in the entire crowd. All the men were bearded and shaggy-haired. Their faces were gaunt and deep-lined. Most of them were thin and hungry looking and the eyes of some were feverish.

"What do you want us to do, Captain?" asked a voice.

"I want you to sail this boat up the river. I want you to sail it right into the midst of the British fleet which is transporting Clinton's troops."

The men were held in a shocked silence. They didn't even turn to glance at one another.

"Will you do it?" Macdougal asked.

"How many ships in Clinton's fleet?" someone demanded.

Macdougal shrugged. "Twelve or fifteen."

"The *Truxtun* is a British ship. I guess we could sail right up to that British fleet without any trouble."

"I think we could."

"And then if we cut loose with all our guns we could give Clinton quite a surprise. We might even disable a good many of his ships. After something like that he would have to stop for repairs and he might not reach Burgoyne in time to be of much help."

Macdougal nodded. The man to whom he was talking was a thin, stooped fellow with sunken eyes and hollow cheeks. His hair was gray and tangled. He was breathing heavily and there was a look of excitement in his face. For an instant his eyes held Macdougal's, then swinging around, he faced the others.

"I say let's do it," he cried suddenly. "What have we got to lose besides our lives?"

There was something in the sound of his challenge that seemed to grip every man there. A good many of them were leaning forward, their bodies tense. It seemed to Macdougal that there was a new light in their eyes.

"Aye, let's do it," someone repeated.

"The ship's at anchor," said Macdougal. "Any man who wishes may leave it, make his way to the shore. Those who remain will sail with me up the river and to an appointment with the British fleet."

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NOT a man left the ship, though all of them realized what lay ahead. They would not sail back from this appointment with the British fleet, nor would they sail on after their engagement. For most of them the encounter could only end in one way, and they knew it.

They couldn't hope for victory, the odds against that were too great. But if they could make the British victory a costly one the final end would be a victory for their own cause. They could understand that.

Macdougal redivided his men into three groups, one to maneuver the ship during their engagement, another to stand by to repel any boarding attempt and a third to man the ship's four batteries. Each man was given a task, even those who had had to be carried aboard. For this was in all probability a final journey for all of them. And even a man who could not stand could kneel to sight a gun.

In the early hours of the morning young Tom Wade came up to the bridge where Macdougal was standing. In his hands he carried a bit of blue cloth, and rather hesitantly, he unrolled it.

"Some of us fixed this up, Captain," he said. "We thought you might like to strike the British colors after the engagement started and we thought we ought to have a flag to fight under."

On a blue square of cloth white letters had been sewn, spelling out the word, LIBERTY, and above the word was a single star.

Macdougal accepted the flag, stared at it for a moment and then nodded. He looked at Tom Wade. This was the man who back in the prison had thrown himself against the door, crying out that he didn't want to die. His face, now, was calm and composed and he stood very straight. There was a quiet assurance in his eyes.

"Yes, we needed a flag, Tom," Macdougal answered. "Will you stand by to strike the British colors and to run it up when the engagement is opened?"

Wade shook his head. "I'm a gunner, Captain. I served in Hamilton's artillery and I'm needed at one of the batteries."

"Then see that someone else handles the flag."

Wade saluted. "Yes sir."

As dawn thinned the shadows of the night, a low, thin fog hung over the river, making the shores barely visible. Every bit of canvas that the *Truxtun* could carry had been crowded on its spars. How far up the river they had come Macdougal didn't know, but he felt that they must have covered a good distance. And now he was suddenly worried for fear that they had come too far, that they had passed the British fleet during the night. A heavy scowl settled over his face and his eyes strained against the gray mists ahead.

A momentary doubt assailed him. He had based this trip on his strange, clairvoyant knowledge which he could not account for. He had had no direct word that a British army under Burgoyne was making its way down from Canada. He had had no direct word that Sir Henry Clinton was moving up the Hudson to meet him. Yet he was certain that he knew the truth.

Macdougal's scowl deepened, his thoughts turning back to that old drinking horn which Mary Carver had placed in his hands the night of his arrest. He was no different now, he told himself, from what he had been then. He, John Macdougal, hadn't changed.

Yet that wasn't strictly true. A wound which should have killed him had healed miraculously. He couldn't seem to tire himself. Though he could feel pain and experience hunger, neither pain nor hunger seemed to harm him. And most strange of all were these bits of information which came into his mind as if by a miracle.

John Macdougal shrugged and tried to throw off his puzzlement. And then, still staring ahead, he stiffened. Through the thin veil of the fog he could make out the spars and masts of a ship. Of another and still others. The vessels were close to the shore, in one of the river's natural harbors. They seemed to be riding at anchor.

"The British fleet," Macdougal breathed.

For a moment he stared toward those ships in silence. The way on up the river lay open. He could sail past the British fleet to some friendly spot farther north, to a haven of safety. But that thought hardly touched his mind. Turning to the steersman, Macdougal called out an order and the *Truxtun* swung from the deep middle river channel and turned in toward the British fleet.

V

AS THE *Truxtun* drew near to the British fleet, John Macdougal called Whit Anderson to the bridge and then made a quick round of the ship. He had a word of encouragement for the men at each of the gun batteries, and a few, last-minute orders. Those orders were hardly necessary. Each man knew what he had to do. Each man was ready.

Ben Mobridge, who had organized the gun crews, was proud of his work. "We've a dozen men who served in the artillery and who can sight a cannon as well as a musket," he told Macdougal. "They'll give a good account of themselves, sir."

Macdougal nodded. "We're not going to heave to, Ben. We're going to keep moving as long as our masts stand and the sails fill with air. We'll pass as close to as many ships as we can. I want enough of them put out of commission to delay Clinton for a week or two weeks or even longer."

"You get us close to those vessels," said Mobridge. "We'll do the rest. As long as we're afloat and as long as we have a shell left, we'll talk through those six-pounders."

They were quite close to the British fleet, now, and John Macdougal hurried back to the bridge. Sail had been shortened and the *Truxtun* had slowed down. Just ahead and so close together that there was hardly room for the *Truxtun* to pass between them were two of the largest ships of the fleet.

Macdougal took the wheel and set a course which would carry the *Truxtun* directly for that opening. He was hailed by the watch from both vessels, but he didn't bother to answer. Once more his eyes swept around the ship. Ben Mobridge stood nearby, awaiting his command. At the mainmast halyards another man was ready to strike the British colors and hoist the blue Liberty flag.

The *Truxtun* slid forward between those two high-hulled ships, a broadside from either one of which could have blasted her from the water. Both vessels had hailed him again but Macdougal still ignored those calls. He looked over at Ben Mobridge, nodded and said clearly, "You may fire when ready, Mr. Mobridge."

Mobridge stiffened. He looked fore and aft then raised an arm and waved it and almost in one voice, the four batteries of the *Truxtun* poured a broadside at the two ships.

To disable and delay had been their orders and the gun crews on the *Truxtun* had aimed their cannon at the waterline of the two British ships. And as the *Truxtun* lurched from the force of the exploding guns, Macdougal saw great, jagged, splintered holes appear suddenly in the hills of the larger vessels. One of them began to ship water at once.

"Again," Mobridge shouted. "Again. And then the ships ahead."

Into the echoing silence which had followed the explosion of the *Truxtun's* guns there sounded the blast of a

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bugle and then the rolling of drums. As a background to those alarms, Macdougal could hear the excited shouts and commands of the officers on the nearest ships. Men appeared suddenly on their decks, rushing to gun stations. And not only on the decks of these nearest ships but on the deck of every ship within sight.

Once more the *Truxtun's* batteries roared, this time aiming higher to rake the decks of the two ships with chain shot, but one cannon must have carried a solid charge for the mainmast of one of the ships was splintered and carried away.

A SHOUT went up from the men on the *Truxtun* and and Macdougal found himself joining in with the other men in that triumphant cry. He twisted the wheel several degrees to port and bore down on three other vessels.

The forward batteries of the *Truxtun* opened fire, and after the first shots Macdougal swung hard aport. Skirting those ships, the *Truxtun* came up behind them, and between them and two others.

Again all four batteries of the *Truxtun* roared into action and for the first time there was an answering fire from two of the British ships. A shot tore through one of the *Truxtun's* sails and another crashed into its stern, high above the waterline. John Macdougal laughed and brought his helm hard up, turning the *Truxtun* in line with the other ships and moving in between two more of them. Once more a double broadside smashed into the enemy ships.

As a lad, John Macdougal had spent two years at sea, but never had he handled a ship which responded more readily to his touch than the *Truxtun.* It was trim and fast and it seemed to have a spirit of its own for this adventure. That feeling was in its helm and in its lift as it made its way through that anchored British fleet. The blue Liberty flag waved proudly from its mast. Several times Macdougal glanced up at it. He rather liked the sight of that deep blue field against the gray morning sky.

Though caught unprepared, most of the British fleet had now weighed anchor and six of the larger vessels were closing in on the *Truxtun.* Macdougal turned to meet the nearest of the six, maneuvering his ship so that the forward batteries could rake the bow of the Britisher, then continuing on to smash the deck of another with a broadside.

This was what he had to do. Damage as many ships as possible, even though the damage to some would be slight. Damage as many ships as possible so that Sir Henry Clinton would be unable to continue on up the river without a delay for repairs.

Two of the British ships were now coming at him from either side and more were moving up on his stern. A broadside from one of the British ships smashed into the *Truxtun's* hull and a shot must have carried away the rudder, for suddenly the *Truxtun* no longer answered the pressure of Macdougal's hands, but started to swing with the current. Another broadside raked the *Truxtun's* deck, and then another, as the British men-of-war swung into position to end the fight.

And the end was near. Macdougal could easily see that. The *Truxtun* was drifting helplessly toward a point of land down-stream, while the British ships crowded ever closer. Boarding parties were ready on two of them.

One of their batteries had been silenced and the firing from the others had slackened considerably. Half of the gun crews were dead and several of the guns had been blasted from their mountings. Macdougal saw Tom Wade working calmly and tirelessly at one of the guns. Ben Mobridge was at another. He joined them and though he had never before fired a cannon, the work of swabbing out, of loading, priming and firing came to him easily and naturally.

"The mainmast this time," shouted young Tom Wade, sighting his cannon at the nearest of the British ships. "Watch it, Captain."

With the roar of Wade's cannon the mainmast of the British man-of-war seemed to shiver and then tilt slowly sideways.

Tom Wade grinned. "I got most of it. It'll come down."

SWEAT poured from Macdougal's body as he labored over his gun. He had lost all track of time. The *Truxtun* was listing now at a faint angle and volley after volley still raked her decks. Her masts were down and her rigging dragged in the water.

How many of his men still lived, Macdougal didn't know, but none of them had suggested that they ask for quarter. A few of the *Truxtun's* guns were still mounted and could still be fired, and these grim, gaunt men were still firing them.

With a sudden crash one of the British ships came up against the *Truxtun* and was made fast, and a boarding party clawed its way up the battered deck. Only then did the men with Macdougal turn from their cannon and seize pike or sword.

"This is the way to die," said Ben Mobridge. "Not in a prison but face to face with the enemy."

There were perhaps three score of them left when the British boarded the *Truxtun,* and they had no chance at all against so many men. Yet for a time they held their own, fighting silently and with a courage such as Macdougal had never seen before. At the order that they surrender or die they only fought more furiously. They had had a taste of prison life and they wanted no more of it.

And so this was the end, here on the deck of the *Truxtun.* And yet it wasn't the end. From where he was at last cornered Macdougal could catch a glimpse of the havoc they had wrought on Sir Henry Clinton's fleet. Nearly every ship showed some marks of the fight. Several had lost their masts, others had splintered hulls. Two seemed to be sinking.

Without question they would be delayed here, and John Macdougal knew that Clinton's expedition would never join Burgoyne's army. And without Clinton's help, Burgoyne faced defeat.

He could see farther than that. Burgoyne's defeat up the river at Saratoga and the failure of this campaign would mark the turning point in the struggle of the colonies for freedom. A long and hard struggle lay ahead but ultimate victory was assured.

The pressure of men around him grew stronger and a sudden blinding pain clouded his vision. He thought that he fell to the deck and that after a long time someone picked up his body and threw it overside. As he splashed into the water it seemed to him that his hand caught in the blue Liberty flag his men had made.

OUT OF the shadows that had claimed him for a time, John Macdougal struggled back to consciousness. The sight of Mary Carver standing near his bed made him think at first that he must be at home and that Howe had just taken New York City.

"I stopped here on the way back to New York after having delivered a message to General Gates for your father," Mary told him. "Someone mentioned a man whose body had been found floating in the river and from the description I knew the man must be you."

Macdougal sat up. There was a wound in his shoulder and another in his head, but they bothered him not at all.

"What happened to Burgoyne?" he asked suddenly.

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"He has surrendered to General Gates at Saratoga. Your father had come to New York to discover the strength of the army Sir Henry Clinton was bringing up the Hudson to meet Burgoyne. When I reached General Gates with the papers your father had given me, General Gates was quite worried. But something happened to delay Clinton. Some Yankee ship, and no one knows the name of it, apparently attacked the entire British fleet. It—"

Mary Carver went on with the story of what she had heard, but John Macdougal was no longer listening to her. He was thinking of Ben Mobridge and Whit Anderson and Tom Wade and of all the men who had sailed with him on the *Truxtun*. They were dead, but some some trick of fate he, their leader, still lived.

"I didn't know that I would escape," he said, looking up at Mary Carver, and there was almost a note of desperation in his voice. "I took the same chance they did. I didn't know that I couldn't die."

Mary Carver frowned. "You're not feeling well, John. Lie down again."

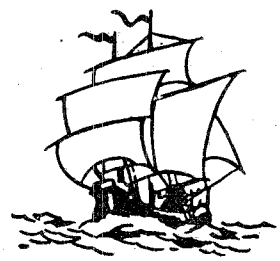
"I didn't know that I would escape, Mary. But maybe it's because I haven't finished what I've got to do."

"Lie down, John."

John Macdougal shook his head. That warning he had heard when he had taken the drink from Odin's cup ran through his mind. In return for the strength and wisdom he was promised he would search for peace but never find it; he would never know the liberty he loved; and his life would be in companionship with death. He was beginning to understand what that warning had meant. He had sold his personal freedom for the strength and understanding to win freedom for his country; and the road he must follow was shadowed by trouble and death.

"This will all be over some day," said Mary Carver quietly. "A nation will be free."

And John Macdougal nodded. He had that to cling to.



MARRINER'S TAVERN

One of the few inns where Washington *didn't* stay

. . . and just as well too . . . for if the great general had, his rest might have been disturbed by shots and shouting, cries in the night, clatter of hoofs, rattle of bones, oaths and scuffles of desperate, murderous men.

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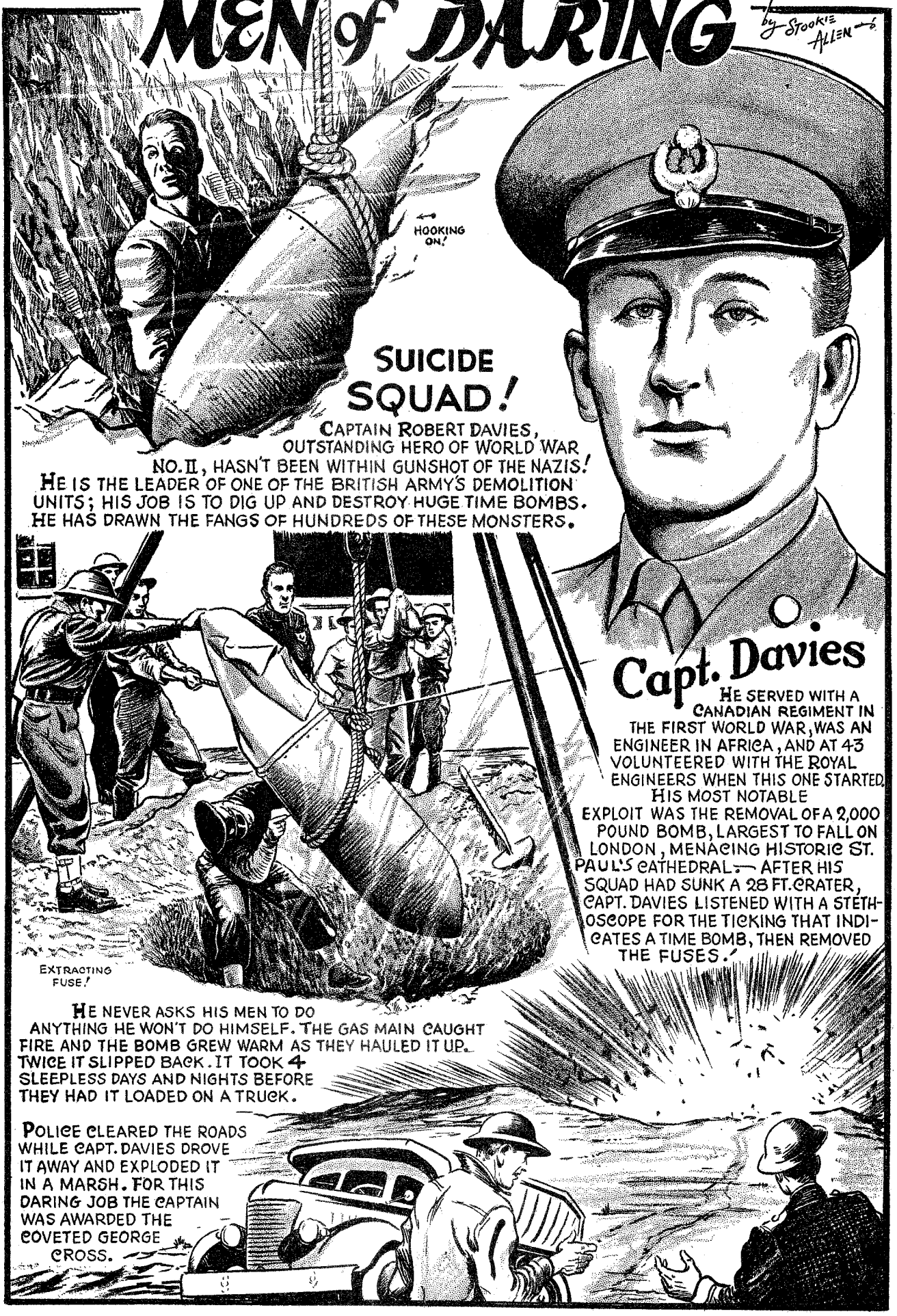
MEN of DARING

by Stookie Allen



SUICIDE SQUAD!

CAPTAIN ROBERT DAVIES, OUTSTANDING HERO OF WORLD WAR NO. II, HASN'T BEEN WITHIN GUNSHOT OF THE NAZIS! HE IS THE LEADER OF ONE OF THE BRITISH ARMY'S DEMOLITION UNITS; HIS JOB IS TO DIG UP AND DESTROY HUGE TIME BOMBS. HE HAS DRAWN THE FANGS OF HUNDREDS OF THESE MONSTERS.

Capt. Davies

HE SERVED WITH A CANADIAN REGIMENT IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR, WAS AN ENGINEER IN AFRICA, AND AT 43 VOLUNTEERED WITH THE ROYAL ENGINEERS WHEN THIS ONE STARTED. HIS MOST NOTABLE EXPLOIT WAS THE REMOVAL OF A 2,000 POUND BOMB, LARGEST TO FALL ON LONDON, MENACING HISTORIC ST. PAUL'S CATHEDRAL.— AFTER HIS SQUAD HAD SUNK A 28 FT. CRATER, CAPT. DAVIES LISTENED WITH A STETHOSCOPE FOR THE TICKING THAT INDICATES A TIME BOMB, THEN REMOVED THE FUSES.

HE NEVER ASKS HIS MEN TO DO ANYTHING HE WON'T DO HIMSELF. THE GAS MAIN CAUGHT FIRE AND THE BOMB GREW WARM AS THEY HAULED IT UP. TWICE IT SLIPPED BACK. IT TOOK 4 SLEEPLESS DAYS AND NIGHTS BEFORE THEY HAD IT LOADED ON A TRUCK.

POLICE CLEARED THE ROADS WHILE CAPT. DAVIES DROVE IT AWAY AND EXPLODED IT IN A MARSH. FOR THIS DARING JOB THE CAPTAIN WAS AWARDED THE COVETED GEORGE CROSS.

A True Story in Pictures

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The dead man had returned to take his ship into disaster

The Ship That Failed

By James Norman

THE last of the Athione folk had left Old Mahon's public-house an hour gone. " 'Tis a blustering night to let the folk go out in," Mahon thought. "The wind and sleet drive and howl like banshees across the moor. But they have enough whiskey to tide them each."

Mahon set the rough chairs back in place, returned a crock jug to the shelf behind the counter, then hobbled toward the large open fireplace, rubbing leathery hands in the warmth of the turf fire. A cold draft swirled the ashes about the fire and the old Irishman squinted toward the door. 'Twas open!

A stranger stood there, his medium frame outlined by the pelting rain and angry lightning at his back. Old Mahon looked sharply. A chill ran through his veins, tingling up his spine. The man was a seaman—but a strange one.

There was a dank smell of seaweed about him as he entered the room and crossed to the fire. It was the odor of the seabottom, barnacles and kelp. He looked steadily at Old Mahon with eyes so deep that the Irishman was sure he saw the sea there, waves breaking and the tide seething over wild shoals.

Mahon took a grip on himself. "Ye be a mite far from the coast," he observed. "Ye're not an Athione man, to be sure?"

The stranger scowled, saying nothing. He shook the

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The mate was young and smart and efficient; he didn't believe in haunts. It was nonsense, he said—until that wild night off the Irish coast when Davy Jones called his orders loud and clear and terrible

night's rain from his shoulders and glanced toward the bottles upon the counter. Mahon reached for a jug of whiskey and a tumbler. His eyes bulged, watching the stranger drink down one tumbler, another, then another. The seaman glanced at Mahon.

"Have you lodgings?" he finally asked.

"Lodgings?"

Mahon shivered again.

"There's not lodgings in the village," he said. "Mine's the only public house and the travelers' room is full up with the builder repairing the bridge at Kilronan Creek."

The seaman turned to go.

"Nay, wait, man!" Mahon stopped him. "'Tis no night for a human soul to be abroad the dark windy road. The gray mud and wet will get ye. If ye've no word against it, man, I'll put ye up in my own room. There's an extra cot ye'll be resting on itself."

The seaman's cold mouth seemed to soften at the corners. He shrugged.

"Your baggage?" Mahon asked.

"There's none."

"Ye're a seaman?" he asked. "A captain maybe?"

"I'm through with the sea."

"That I thought. 'Tis a drear life, no?"

The innkeeper carried a smoldering bucket of turf to the cold room above the public-house. It was a small, barely furnished place with a plain bed, a washstand and a cot in one corner. The seaman sat on the cot and watched the old man bring out a half-dozen newspapers, the *Galway Times*.

"The latest is a week old or more," Mahon apologized. "But 'tis still news ye might be wanting. There's a piece in last week's of a ship that tried sinking twice the same place."

The seaman stiffened. "The *Nicholette*—"

Mahon looked up, pleased. "Ye know her then? Well, I'll read ye the bit. A blather tale it is . . . ."

COINCIDENCE AT SEA

On January 10, 1918 the American Freighter, *Nicholette*, three thousand ton, ran afoul Killrun Shoals southwest of Galway port. Though the ship was abandoned and her captain drowned when a small boat capsized, the *Nicholette* failed to sink.

This Monday, January 10, 1941, exactly twenty-three years to the day, the *Nicholette* was again reported in trouble near the Killrun Shoals. She was sighted in trouble by the Killrun Coast Guards toward evening. By daybreak there was no trace of her.

Old Mahon shook his head.

"'Tis a spell she carries. I would nay be on her. She's probably already to the bottom. The paper is a week old," he said, glancing at his guest for nautical confirmation.

"She'll never sink!" the stranger answered flatly.

"Aye, you've a later word then?" asked Mahon.

"You'll never sink a ship that's lost a haunt," the other man replied. "When a ship's haunted, either it goes down or the haunt gets beaten, then no power on earth will ever sink her. They'll dismantle her, plate by plate, first. The *Nicholette's* like that. She lost a haunt on her run from America to Galway—last week."

The smell of seaweed and sea death surrounded the man.

* * *

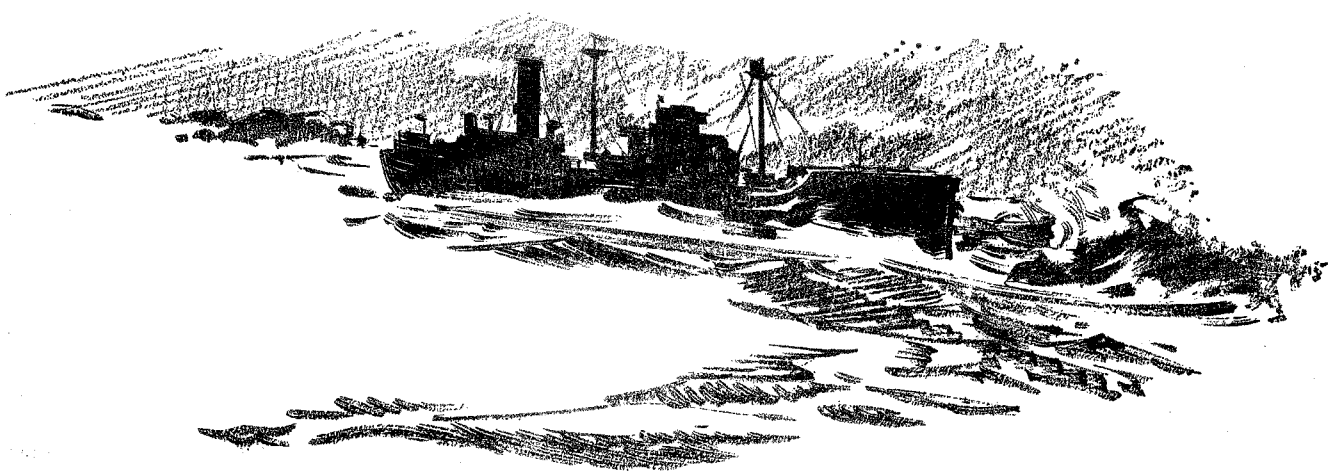
THE *Nicholette*—she was a skittish old baby, about three thousand tons and as warped as an octogenarian. Her pedigree was high-sounding, particularly when read out at Lloyds in London, but from the shape of her shoulders and the way she threw her stern when riding light any watch man could tell there was something fishy about her papers.

She had been one of the World War I breed. Their keels were laid out by the hour and launched conveyor-belt style with no idea of what they were designed to carry.

The *Nicholette* had done a speck of duty in a convoy, hauling motorcycles for the Canadian Expeditionary Force. She did so well, they graduated her to carrying artillery and that was when her bottom scraped the Killrun Shoals, throwing such a fright into her captain that he abandoned ship and drowned in the process.

The old girl rated a medal after that. She didn't sink! Having a mind of her own, she rode the tide into Galway Bay saving the cannons for the CEF. The papers played it up as a patriotic phenomenon and promptly forgot about it.

From that day on her career had not been so model. She carried a procession of masters, who, after a second or third voyage, declared that the *Nicholette* was the one ship they didn't want to go down with. They usually quit, saying she was slightly queer.



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After November 11th the following year, *Nicholette* got an honorable discharge from the service and promptly went into the smuggling trade. The urge to lead a dangerous life had gotten under her plates in the same way as it touched a lot of the "lost generation," and she shipped illegal trappings to Mexico, Colombia, China and other ports. Her belly was generally full of one kind of explosive or another.

When War II broke out seaman were somewhate surprised that the *Nicholette* survived the first eight months. Shrapnel prices had been going up steadily. She had been snooping up and down the Pacific Coast, taking on an occasional Mauser or grenade for delivery to Guatemala under cover of darkness. Some days she'd fly a Jap flag, another day the Peruvian colors.

The week she was a Jap ship she picked up a captain named Skaggs who stuck by her for no accountable reason. Skaggs was made for better things. He was a quiet, pleasant man of normal build, not particularly impressive, but he knew his sea. He knew his ship and his men; knew exactly where regulation and discipline give way to the human element.

Skaggs must have been an old timer. His face was sort of leathery and yellow. When he came aboard the *Nicholette* he was wrapped in an odor of antiseptics, as if he had just come out of a marine hospital. He probably had. The medicine chest in his cabin was filled with bottles and jars of patent medicines and he kept himself well saturated with the stuff.

THE Old Man ran the *Nicholette* down one side of South America and back up the other. It was then that the ship showed up in Montreal waving a bright Panamanian flag as if to say, "Well, I'm legal now." What's more, the Dominion Government handed her a bellyful of P&W airplane engines plus a deck cargo for shipment to England via Galway.

Everyone from the deck officers to the black gang had an uneasy feeling about this voyage. It didn't start proper. Loading was too easy. Then, upon nosing past Belle Isle into an Atlantic that should have been rough, but was as mellow as six-year New England rum, the *Nicholette* did something truly extraordinary. Her two-degree sta'board list disappeared! She rode like the *Queen Mary*.

The crew didn't take to this pleasantly. They were a superstitious lot. They had to be—or else go mad aboard the dumpy little coaster. There was a lot of discussion about this business of riding on an even keel and it eventually boiled down to the fact that there was a very sick man aboard—the mess boy.

"An ill omen, it is," Mr. Gill, the third mate, had complained. "Leave a port carrying an almost dead man spells bad luck." Mr. Gill was a God-fearing, upright oldster with graying hair. He lent the ship a flavor of gracious dignity in addition to being the most superstitious man aboard. He collected rabbits' feet, talismans and the like.

Gill and the first mate, Mr. Clark, were on the bridge at the moment the fo'c'sle grievance committee put in an appearance. The committee was one man, a crusty Cockney oiler.

"What is it?" Mr. Gill asked.

"I been sent ta beef wi' the Old Man," the oiler answered.

"He's asleep. What is it?"

"H'it 'as to do wi' the mess boy, Johnny. H'it ain't right ta take a ship out wi' bad luck on it. Tha lads thunk it over and they're wanting Cap'n Skaggs ta turn the ship ta St Johns for putting the kid off."

"St. Johns?" Gill said.

"The mess laddie won't live ta Galway. We'll 'ave bad luck upon us. That 'as already started. Tain't right for us to be riding even keel."

Mr. Gill nodded in quiet agreement.

"Tha men's considering drastic means if we don't ship in and let tha laddie off," added the one-man committee as a final blow.

"Mutiny?" Mr. Gill felt himself pushed aside. It was young Clark, the mate. "Mutiny," he snapped again. He grabbed the oiler's shirt and shook the fellow. "Get back where you belong! This ship's got a course and a schedule. We're filling it—dead men or not!"

The oiler shot him a crafty glance. "Tha men is talking drastic," he said.

Crack! Mr. Clark's fist clipped the Cockney's dirty jaw. It was a quick, effortless motion. The oiler's head snapped back. The blow didn't knock him down. It simply convinced him the bridge wasn't safe.

Mr. Gill stared at young Clark after the oiler had slid down the ladder. He had his own ideas about the young mate. Unpleasant ideas. Clark was too young and stubborn. He had all the makings of a deck officer but he didn't have the feel of the sea and all that went with it. He was the perfect officer—hard, smooth, cold, efficient, taking men for machines.

He dusted his knuckles and glanced at Mr. Gill. "Sorry," he said.

"For what?" asked Gill.

"Hitting him," said Clark.

Gill looked at the mate with shrewd eyes. Clark wasn't sorry. He was only sorry for the deviation in the smooth discipline he demanded aboard ship.

"You know, the men are right about that boy," Mr. Gill said. "It is bad luck. I feel it."

Mr. Clark looked around sharply. "Listen, man," he said, "this is a ship. It's made of iron. It's a mechanism. There's no room on it for fanatics here. We're not conducting a witches' hour. I'll see to that."

THE *Nicholette* punched eastward along the 51 degree while aboard her the routine was so normal it scared people. The early sun rode a couple of points off of sta'board and the ship kicked her stern around in the sunset like a high-heeled lady. The weather was beautiful, exceptionally beautiful for winter.

It was that way until Johnny, the mess boy, got really sick. One day Cap'n Skaggs had the lad moved to the steward's cabin and turned the place into a sick bay. Johnny kept getting worse. Everybody aboard took a deep interest in the lad's condition. Steward busied himself hustling tea up and down. The Old Man sent in a dozen bottles of his stinking patent medicines. Mr. Gill salted the sick bay with an assortment of Indian charms and rabbit's feet besides stopping in occasionally to read choice bits from the Bible.

Generally there was a cluster of hands and deck officers hovering about the lad's door. They were all trying to help him through, knowing that if he died some unmentionable bad luck might overtake the *Nicholette*. But during Mr. Clark's watch, the eight to twelve, there was no crowd.

The mate didn't believe in babying a hand, particularly

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a mess boy. "Steward will take care of him," he snapped. "That's enough."

He put the men to work, sweating the superstition out of them. First he had the deck cargo shifted again. Then he had tackle tossed over the *Nicholette's* sides and initiated a three-day painting bee. The ship was splashed iron gray from stem to stern.

"There's a war on," he said. "Camouflage."

"We're so damn rusty and crusty no one would recognize us as a ship," the bosun complained.

"Discipline!" the first mate answered bitingly.

When Johnny died, toward the end of the camouflaging bee, Mr. Gill blamed the young first mate. Johnny had been in deep agony for two days and the mate hadn't let anyone but the steward look to him. Mr. Gill felt that if a lot of men are let to think hard about a sick man's chances, he's likely as not to pull through.

Things boiled over during the service for the dead which was held by the midshipsrail at sunset. Johnny was laid out upon a canvas squared over a hatch board. The Old Man said a brief prayer over him, then signaled the bosun to sew up the canvas. As the bosun's needle work got toward the dead mess boy's head, Mr. Gill came out with something that marked him as one who had sailed before canvas.

"You'll kindly pass the needle through both nostrils of the dead as is customary," he told the bosun.

"What?" Mate Clark cut in.

"Aye, sir," said the Bosun. "You close his nose. That's to keep air in him till he gets to Davy Jones' Locker."

"Forget the foolishness," Mr. Clark spoke coldly. "Sew the canvas and forget the superstition."

"But it's customary," Mr. Gill interrupted quietly.

"Customary!" Clark exploded. "A fairy tale. There's no room for that aboard this ship! Sew him up!"

It looked for a minute as if this were to be the showdown between Clark on one side and Mr. Gill with the crew behind him on the other. Hard looks passed to and fro.

"Wait!" It was Captain Skaggs. He looked at young Clark in an understanding, yet firm manner.

"Mr. Clark," he said. "I've no word against your desire for discipline aboard ship. It's well near perfect. Although it's not in the regulations, I believe Mr. Gill is correct this time. There are certain customs of the sea we must remember." The Old Man nodded toward the bosun, saying, "Through the nose."

Clark glared on in silence while the sewing was completed and the weighted canvas containing Johnny's body was tilted overside.

The fo'c'sle hands watched respectfully until the gray-green sea had swallowed the offering. They half expected to see Davy's salmon-faced little sea dwarfs collect the body. Then Corson, the Cockney oiler who had once received Mr. Clark's anger, spoke up.

"Ain't we getting the usual dead ration?"

Clark stared at the man.

"A cup o' rum for the passing o' the dead," the man repeated.

"That's right," said Mr. Gill.

"Rum you'll get in Ireland," said Clark. "I'll have no drunks working under me. Tomorrow you'll be chipping and getting that coat of red lead on the foredeck plates. Rum won't make it go faster."

The men murmured among themselves and Mr. Gill and the bosun sort of sided with them. It was lucky the Old Man had retired to his cabin. A few members of the black gang joined in. Corson, the oiler, slipped a metal marlinspike from its post and edged toward the mate.

Mr. Gill saw him and shook his head. "No, not that way, man," he cried.

"He's a-gone too far," Corson growled.

SUDDENLY plenty of excitement broke loose—but not the kind everyone expected. The lookout standing at the fo'c'sle head sent up a warning cry, "Submarine!"

Old Man Skaggs appeared on the port bridge wing. "All hands on!" he ordered. "Get going!" Mr. Clark snapped his own orders. Both he and Mr. Gill scurried up the foreladder to the bridge like a pair of monkeys.

"Mr. Gill, relieve the watch of the wheel," Skaggs said.

A periscope glided along side the *Nicholette,* perhaps a quarter mile off port. Soon the sub's hull broke surface, water washing off its plates, reflecting the red of the sunset. A conning hatch opened and men appeared upon its narrow deck. In the uncertain glow it was impossible to make out whether they were British, German or Italian.

"Sender," Captain Skaggs spoke to the watch. "Flag them. Find out who they are. Tell them we're neutral."

The watch signaled frantically for a moment. There was no response from the sub. Little figures still moved around on its deck. Abruptly a puff of smoke, a concussion and the scream of a 75 mm. shell shattered the quiet of the sea.

"That," said Mr. Clark coldly, "is illegal. They should identify themselves first."

Captain Skaggs glanced at the *Nicholette's* colors. She was flying the American Stars and Stripes at the moment. "The sub must be German," he said. "Break out the flags!"

A moment later the Italian flag ran up the *Nicholette's* halyard. "That may hold them," said the Old Man.

It didn't. A second shot screeched across the little coaster's bow, practically taking the lookout along with it. The explosion came some thirty yards off sta'board. The *Nicholette* rolled uneasily.

"Must be British. My mistake," said the Old Man. Immediately the British flag, a Turkish flag, a Mexican and the colors of a half-dozen nations raced up the halyards, in fact every bunting the *Nicholette* had ever cruised under.

On the wing, the first mate eyed the water sharply. Suddenly he swung across the bridge into the monkey tower. "Torpedo—direct abeam!" he shouted.

He bucked Mr. Gill away from the tiller and swung the spokes hard sta'board, trying to bring the ship around out of line with the fuzzy white wake streaking a foot underwater toward the little coaster. The bridge and monkey house were in turmoil for a minute. Mr. Gill shouted advice. The cap'n yelled unheard orders. Clark tugged at the wheel. It was no use. The *Nicholette* had never in her life moved fast; she wasn't going to do it now.

A cry came from the men on the well deck. Something queer was happening. The torpedo raced along its appointed route; then, to everyone's amazement, it sank beneath the surface, diving deep beneath the *Nicholette's* hull. It came back to surface on the other side and headed straight out toward the South Atlantic leaving a trail of white along the sea surface.

"It's been charmed!" Mr. Gill gasped. His face turned fishbelly white.

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Now the submarine slipped beneath the sea, quietly, without sending another torpedo. Its wake was seen cutting toward the nor'west.

"We're haunted! That's what!" Mr. Gill repeated. He leaned weakly against the binnacle and wiped his face. "The ship's being saved for something special! A haunt! That's why we weren't struck."

"You're crazy," Clark answered. "We weren't hit because I had the wheel."

"And that torpedo going under us and coming up? Explain that!" Mr. Gill said.

Mr. Clark shrugged matter-of-factly and looked to Cap'n Skaggs to back his words. "A freak," he said. "A current probably deflected its elevator."

"I'm sure it was a sign," Mr. Gill added solemnly.

MR. GILL was right. Strange things began to happen aboard the *Nicholette*. They were things even Mr. Clark found difficult to explain in an empirical way. But the mate was stubborn.

A hundred and eight miles off Land's End, two hundred and twenty-five from Galway altogether, the *Nicholette* nosed her way into a fog so thick and cold it could have been sliced and buttered. Mr. Gill's eyes bulged queerly when he looked at the barometer. He called the mate.

"Look. It's like I said. We're haunted! The barometer reads higher: fair weather, warmer!"

Clark raised his brows. "It's broken. Run down and get the reading on the barometer in the saloon."

"I did," said Mr. Gill.

"So?"

"It reads the same."

"They're both broken."

Mr. Gill shook his head uneasily. He didn't care to discuss the matter with the mate. The Old Man, on the other hand, would understand, but not the mate. So he went about, quietly keeping his eye peeled for new signs of the unknown and gradually stuffing his pockets with the various good luck charms he had collected over three quarters of a century seafaring.

Along about afternoon next day the Old Man, the mate and Mr. Gill gathered in the charthouse and brought forth the British Admiralty chart covering the run from Killrun Shoals along the nor'west Irish coast to Galway itself. The chart was very accurate. It had to be for the Killrun Shoals.

"We should near the Shoals tonight," the Old Man computed. In the soupy weather the *Nicholette* had cut her knottage down to a mere five or six.

Mr. Gill gulped enormously. His shaking finger pointed at the Admiralty chart. Both the mate and the Old Man looked, then the mate gasped.

The ink on the chart slowly faded before their eyes, leaving a large blob of white where the Killrun Shoals had been! It looked like those uncharted white expanses on maps, saying: *Polar region, unexplored.*

"It's t-t-he h-h-haunt!" Mr. Gill stuttered.

Clark, the mate, appeared a little shaken, but he glared at the third. "Haunt, hell! The ink faded. Probably poor ink."

"Never seen that happen before," Captain Skaggs spoke slowly and in awe.

"Anything can happen once," said Clark. "There are no more charts of the Shoals and they're too damn dangerous to run in this weather. I suggest we put in at Belfast."

Mr. Gill's hair went up on ends for the moment young Clark mentioned Belfast a new blob appeared on the chart. The entire Irish Sea vanished. Also the channel soundings for the ports along the Welsh coast.

"Cripes," Mr. Clark swore. "Who the devil sold us this chart?"

"It's the haunt," the third mate repeated.

Clark looked to Cap'n Skaggs. "I'd suggest we change our course toward Portugal. If the ink fades there it'll be of no matter. I know every inch of that coast. What do you say, sir?"

Skaggs thought it over and agreed. It was a very sensible decision because a haphazard try at any of the English or Welsh ports was sure suicide. Most coastlines were strung with necklaces of mines not to mention submarines and pocket battleships which doted on heavy fogs.

THE Old Man charted a new course and when the order was made the usual happened. The entire coast of Portugal from Cape Finisterre to Cape St. Vincent turned into a white meaningless blob flanking the Iberian Peninsula.

The *Nicholette* was veered south by southeast in spite of that. Then, strangely, the ship seemed to swing back on her original course toward the Killrun Shoals. The watch at the wheel was dumbfounded. He stood there with his fingers frozen on the spokes, his eyes glued to the compass in its binnacle.

"She's turning by herself," he shouted half-crazily. "We're heading east-nor'east. I can't make her go any other way."

The mate grabbed the wheel.

The *Nicholette* heeled slowly. Clark squinted at the compass. There was a flicker of a smile on his lips, but that quickly vanished. The ship was still going east-nor'east.

"The compass is off," the Old Man cut in.

"It's the rudder gear," Clark said.

Just then there was a rift in the fog off the sta'board stern. For a moment the late afternoon sun poked through. The mate grabbed his sextant and made for the bridge door. "Watch the clock," he said to Mr. Gill. Clark set his mirror, got the chronometer call from the third and returned to the wheelhouse white-faced. He had worked out his position from memory, without using the tables.

"The compass is okay," he said. "Can't you see the sun right behind us? It's the rudder gear fouled. We've got to work quick. By my reckoning we're an hour thirty minutes off Killrun Shoals."

"We can't be," Mr. Gill murmured.

The mate shot him a cold glance.

"I knew it would happen," Mr. Gill added solemnly. "We'll never do anything about it now—the haunt. I'm telling you, Clark, you'll find nothing wrong with the rudder gear. The ship has taken things into her own hands. We're not running her any more. She's dead set on going east-nor'east."

"Tommyrot," Mr. Clark snapped.

"You'll see. Just try to kill the engines now. They won't stop. The ship's got an appointment and she's going to make it no matter what we do."

"Appointment?"

Mr. Gill's virtuous face was pallid now. "With her old master, the one that drowned the time she didn't sink off the Shoals," he said.

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"What kind of drivel is that?" Clark sneered.

"It can happen. It has happened before. Once in the China Seas," Mr. Gill went on in dead seriousness. "There was a Chinese captain there who deserted his junk and was lost at sea. His ship didn't go down. Davy Jones didn't mind the color of his skin, but he wouldn't take the man in until he had gone down with his ship properly. So they made an agreement. Davy let him come back to find his ship so he could go down with it. The man was a living corpse. People actually saw him on the waterfront in Shanghai—waiting. He was no pretty sight."

"It's coming," said the third. "I've seen the signs. And there'll be more. When we get near him the fog will clear completely. The sea will get heavy. And when he comes aboard to take over, the compass in the binnacle will be fixed fast. It won't budge a point. That's the last sign. After that it's the bottom of the sea for us unless we're quick enough to smash the compass right after it sets. That breaks the haunt, you know."

The muscles in young Clark's jaw throbbed with exasperated anger. He shot Mr. Gill a glance as if to say the man was hopeless.

"Listen," he said. "This ship's wacky, but it's not haunted. Mechanical trouble, you understand. We've no room for haunts. Now just to settle your mind, if one of your extra special haunts comes aboard I'll personally get rid of it—without smashing a good sixty dollar compass."

AN HOUR later Mr. Gill's predictions were fulfilled to the point. Nothing could be found haywire with the rudder gear. Then the engines refused to stop, reverse or run half-speed ahead. Old Man Skaggs looked put out by this while Mr. Clark swore up and down deck.

Soon the fog drifted off leeward, letting a blatant half-disc of sun slide under the *Nicholette's* stern rail. Over the fo'ard beam Ireland's ragged coastline showed in silhouette, a moving mass of dark hills and sheer bleak cliffs. The sea took a turn for the worse. A gusty wind whipped waves upon the murky surface and slammed spray against the ship's plates with the force of hailstones.

A dull booming sounded to windward and the watch in the wheelhouse glanced anxiously at Mr. Gill. "I think we'd better have the Old Man up," he said. "Them are the Shoals!"

The little coaster rose and spun dizzily, hesitated upon a ragged crest, balancing over two yawning depressions. Suddenly the cabin shuddered, windows vibrating madly. The whole sky and sweeping sea outside seemed to rattle with it. Mr. Gill thought of young Clark belowdeck still fiddling with the screw-drive steering engine.

The darkness outside had grown quite thick, windswept clouds now overhanging the sky. The *Nicholette* bucked every other swell, the rudder holding her fast east-nor'east as if she were riveted to that course. Each few minutes the watch gave a tentative jerk at the wheel, knowing it wouldn't help. The ship had taken her own course into hand.

Off to the windward, the booming sound increased. The white, spume covered band marking the Shoals lifted into sight. The *Nicholette* drove head on.

Mr. Gill started down to fetch the cap'n. It was cheerless, cold and wet on the ladder. Somehow, he slipped and banged down the steps, ending wedged between the ladder and a davit. He groaned some, knowing his leg was broken.

When the steward found him a few minutes later Gill was raving mad. He was carried to his cabin and the mate came in to look him over.

"The Shoals!" Gill screeched at high pitch. "They'll get us. The old cap'n . . . He's sitting on a rock there grinning. Grinning at us through the spray. He's coming aboard. There at the port rail . . . See him . . . knock him off . . . Smash the compass. . . ."

"He's daft," said Clark.

The steward shook his head. He wasn't so sure the third was daft. If the third was daft, then everyone on the ship but Clark was touched also. Already the black gang and the fo'c'sle hands were shivering on the aft well deck waiting to take to the boats. The *Nicholette* didn't need them any more. She was running herself.

Mr. Clark stepped into the blasting wind and peered at the frightened, superstitious hands. "Back to your posts!" he shouted against the blow. "No boats'll be put off."

"She's haunted!" one of the men growled.

"You're cracked!" Clark answered. "Back where you belong."

"Bash 'im, laddies—"

Clark was already in motion. His fist caught the man cleanly on the temple and rocked him against the port rail. The seaman's body slipped to the deck limply, a drivel of blood running from between his lips. Clark glared at the remaining men. "Get fo'ard!" he snapped.

The men surged forward an instant, then hesitated. They saw the mate was hard, but hard without the use of marlinspike or revolver. Something in his eyes outfought the fear that rode their emotions. They hesitated between the creak of lifeboats upon davits and the enormous thunder of the Shoals directly ahead. Then they made their choice—the Shoals and Clark.

THE mate turned to the ladder. The wheelhouse light stood out like a single bright eye tossing wildly against the clouds that were blue with cold. Clark shivered a bit and bunched his oilskin around his collar. Gripping the rail on the bridge wing, he squinted through the spray.

There was a nightmare dead ahead—inevitable disaster. He had counted on the Old Man and himself getting the gear under control. But time was short. The waves were pounding up a thunderous surf above the reefs and shoals a quarter mile ahead.

He thought of the hands and their attempt to launch a boat. Superstitious lot—or were they? Perhaps the Old Man was thinking of riding the tub through the Shoals. Crazy! Clark thought of Mr. Gill. Crazy!

The lookout's voice screamed through the darkness and wind, "Reefs!"

Young Clark's body stiffened. He whirled about and yanked the door of the wheelhouse. The Old Man was inside, his fists clamped tight upon the wheelspokes, his eyes glued on the raging surf ahead. Clark sucked in his breath for the man was crazy, hanging on to a wheel that had no control over the ship.

"Shall I give the order to abandon ship?" Clark steadied himself to ask.

The captain didn't answer. He was grinning—yes, grinning gleefully at the shoals.

"Cap'n Skaggs!" Clark raised his voice.

The Old Man chuckled harshly and pointed at the compass in its binnacle before the helm. "Look at it," he said.

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Clark saw! The compass needle was fixed fast! It pointed direct east-nor'east and down. It was set there as solid as a rock.

The mate stepped back, shocked. He felt his skin tighten, creeping coldly over his bones. The cabin was no longer filled with the annoying odor of Skagg's antiseptics. Instead, there was a dank, slimy smell of seaweeds about him. It was the odor of the seabottom and of a sodden corpse. It came from Skaggs.

Clark felt deathly sick. A chill cut through to his bones as he stared into the captain's eyes, seeing the boiling surf deep within them, the waves breaking and the tide seething over wild shoals. It was the Old Man, but he was dead—grinning dead.

"Didn't believe in haunts, did you?" The Old Man chuckled. "Well, it's too late now. I've been twenty-three years looking for my ship, to get my hands on this wheel, to take her over the Shoals. Maybe Skaggs isn't my real name. It doesn't matter. I've used a lot of names, and a lot of medicines to keep the sea smell off me. It's been a long time for a body with no soul. Tonight I'll rest peaceful, with the sea soft about my body. Tonight you'll—Damn you, Clark! Let go of that helm!"

The mate's fingers slipped. Skaggs' full dead weight crashed into his, sent him staggering across the cabin. Anger flared in Clark. Above the pounding of the shoals he heard the living dead man's hysterical laughter. "Keep back! I'm taking her down!"

Clark felt the catch-bolt of a wall locker. A moment later he gripped a revolver in his hand.

"Get below!" he screamed at the captain.

"You're too late, lad," Skaggs chuckled.

Clark tensed himself and pressed the trigger. The gun bucked and roared. Acrid smoke filled the wheelhouse. Clark's eyes bulged with horror for the Old Man was still standing, grinning at him despite the black bloodless bullet hole through his chest. "You can't kill me," Skaggs roared. "I'm already dead!"

The cabin door suddenly burst open. It was Mr. Gill. He had dragged himself and his broken leg up the bridge ladder. He crawled across the doorsill, his features torn with agony. "The binnacle, boy! Smash the—" His voice petered out as he fainted.

Captain Skaggs leaped toward the fallen man with an angry snarl. "You fool! Idiot!" he shouted.

Young Clark pivoted to the wheel. With the butt of his pistol he smashed through the compass plate and tore out the needle. The helm abruptly spun free. The ship fell off for a second and rolled wickedly in a trough of the sea.

The mate darted a glance over his shoulder. Mr. Gill was still on the floor, but the Old Man had vanished! As the ship rode wild the cabin door slammed against Gill's prone body.

Clark grabbed at the spinning wheel, braking the spokes with his foot in order to catch it. He got his grip. Squinting through the windows, he saw the *Nicholette's* black bow rearing its head above the white boiling shoals. Gritting his teeth, he leaned hard left. It didn't look like more than a dozen yards before the little coaster's keelson would grind through that surf. Then, slowly, the *Nicholette's* snub prow slid to the left. A moment later the shoals showed their whiteness off the sta'board beam.

YOUNG MR. CLARK looked tougher and sterner now that he was acting captain. But there was a flicker of a smile at the corners of his rigid mouth when he stepped into the third mate's cabin.

"Feeling better, Mr. Gill?" he asked.

The *Nicholette* was snoring nor'east along the Irish coast in a slow swell. Her engine was turning over its regular sixty-one revolutions per minute and her steering tackle behaved marvelously. What's more, she was due to make Galway in daylight, and with a two-degree list to sta'board.

Mr. Gill glanced ruefully at his bandaged leg. "I'm all right," he said. "I'm sorry, I must have lost my bearings yesterday. Will you take my apologies to the Old Man."

"I will," Clark nodded. A smile flickered on his mouth again.

"We made the Shoals?" asked Gill.

"Yes. One man lost."

Mr. Gill cleared his throat and stared at Clark in embarrassment. "I guess you want me to admit I've learned my lesson," he said. "There's no room for supersti—"

"You mean there's no room for haunts aboard the *Nicholette,*" said Clark.

"That's right."

"Well, that depends on how you look at it," Clark grinned. He fished a broken compass needle from his pocket. "I thought I'd add this bit to your collection of—eh—curios. It's had its uses."

Men Who Make the Argosy—Charles Marquis Warren

THE author of "Forward into Battle" probably won't thank us for saying that he's a prodigy; but there just doesn't seem to be any way around it. Bill Warren is under thirty; yet before we had finished printing his "Bugles Are for Soldiers," last year, there was such a flood of fan mail about it that the Argonotes editor was a wreck for months afterward. He was happy about it, though: the comments were ninety-nine percent favorable.

The lad seems never to have been idle. He's composed popular songs; written movies for Fred Astaire and Edward G. Robinson; acted in stock with Henry Fonda and Margaret Sullavan. He worked his way to Europe as an ordinary seaman; skipped ship and wandered around Europe ("for ages," he says) on $37.50; and came home as a workaway.

(A workaway, he explains, is a gentleman sailor who works eighteen hours a day every day at sea for one cent.)

Further about Mr. Warren, in his own words: "I was also a farmer for five years; I can milk a cow, cut asparagus after somebody else planted it eight years previously, drive a tractor and mowing machine; and all I retained from my five years was that the country is where those horrible green things come out of the earth in the spring."

Mr. Warren's home is in Baltimore. He gets to New York for a visit once or twice a year; and on these occasions throws the ARGOSY staff and various other people into a state of not unpleasant confusion for about a week, then retires vaguely and happily to his typewriter.

He has never been known to be on time for any appointment; but no matter how long his friends wait, they forget and forgive when he shows up.

That, in itself, is a kind of tribute.

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LEGENDS of the LEGIONARIES

: ORIGINS · OF · THE · CUSTOMS · AND · SAYINGS · OF · THE · FIGHTING-MEN : by W·A·WINDAS :

"SECRET" WEAPONS

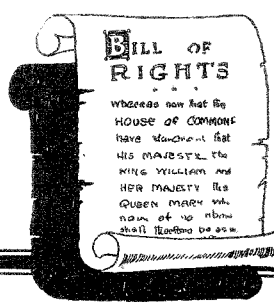
Throughout history, "secret" weapons have nearly always proved disappointing to the side that used them. A noteworthy exception to this rule, however, was "Greek Fire", a liquid-fire compound used by the Eastern Empire. It kept the Mohammedans out of Constantinople for 1000 years.

· FIRST PARACHUTIST ·

The first living creature to descend in a parachute was a dog, in 1785. Pilatre de Rozier and Marquis d'Arlandes, who made the first balloon flight two years earlier, tried the parachute with the dog before risking a human life.

· NO "ROYAL ARMY" ·

Great Britain has a "Royal Navy" and a "Royal Air Force", but their land forces are never referred to as the "Royal Army". This is because, during the reign of William and Mary, the House of Commons imposed a Bill of Rights which prohibited the King from keeping an army in peacetime.



· SPICES ·

So important were spices in the ancient world that Rome, in the year 61 B.C., passed a law which exempted from all military service those who were connected with the spice industry.

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Forward Into Battle

Marchant stepped aside to let Rand peer into that terrible room

By Charles M. Warren

RAND MANSFIELD and SCOTTO THORGENSEN, American newspapermen, are sent to Mexico City on an assignment that is unexplained to them until GENERAL SAM THRESHER, of the State Department, comes down and informs them that he wants their help in discovering the identity of the LEADER, the ace Nazi agent, spymaster, and saboteur on the American Continent. It is believed that his headquarters, as well as a mysterious and powerful radio sending station, are in Mexico. The General thinks that Rand and Scotto may succeed where his regular operatives have failed, because of their erstwhile friendship with STEW MARCHANT, who has reached high rank in the pseudo-peasant party of CARLITO TOLEDAREZ, an organization openly brown-shirt fascist in character, which is rousing great antagonism for the United States throughout Mexico.

Marchant, it is rumored, had been unable to reenter the United States after his participation in the Spanish War, because he had flown for Franco. Embittered and hating all things pertaining to his country, he settled in Mexico and openly avowed his admiration for all things Nazi.

THEIR TASK is rendered difficult from the outset because of the enmity of FELIX HABIG, German *chargé d'affaires* in Mexico City. He tells them openly that he knows they are spies and promises that their every move will be watched.

Habig secretly arranges that Rand shall "inherit" the vast Santoyo hacienda, which is his secret headquarters, feeling that the presence there of the two Americans will successfully divert all suspicion from the place. He counts on the COUNTESS NATA VON HOCHENLOBE, who is feigning madness in order that Rand and Scotto will not legally be able to evict her, and on ELSA ERLACH, her secretary, to keep Rand and Scotto in the dark. But the Countess is wildly jealous of Habig's interest in Elsa and refuses to cooperate. She drives the Americans away.

MEANWHILE, Rand has fallen in love with Elsa, who admits that she is no German, but a British operative; and the situation is complicated by the arrival of

This story began in the Argosy for June 7

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ARDITH, Rand's estranged wife. Ardith yields gracefully and obtains the Mexican divorce for which she has come.

At the hacienda, Rand has also met ROLF KONSTANTIN, a dissipated German aristocrat, who proclaims that he is out of Habig's reach because of a mission to which he has been assigned by the highest Nazi official.

Rand and Scotto talk to Marchant but he refuses to have anything to do with them, and warns them to leave the country.

They are involved in a shooting scrape in which Ardith is wounded; and Scotto, who has always been devoted to her, flies her back to the United States. Rand is arrested and charged with murder, and after a hasty trial, is sentenced to be shot.

MARCHANT, in charge of the execution-squad, leads Rand to the hacienda, where he hands Rand his gun. Then he tells Rand the truth. He believes that the Leader is his own father, from whom he has been estranged for many years. His father had forced him to change his name. And, fearing Marchant's knowledge of his own fifth-column activities, had falsely given out the rumor that Marchant had flown for Franco, causing him to be barred from the United States. But Marchant, getting wind of his father's Mexican activities, had gone there and built up an elaborate sham-existence. His father had appeared to approve of this changed attitude, but Marchant is not sure that his suspicions are entirely stilled.

This is a strange and terrible story, leaving Rand shaken and a little incredulous.

They hear the drone of a plane, indicating the arrival of the Leader for his nightly broadcast. Two huge towers rear into the sky. Marchant leads Rand into a tunnel at the end of which is the room from which the Leader speaks.

In a moment they will see his face. . . .

CHAPTER XXXI

NO LONGER A MASK

THERE WAS NO room for Rand to look in, but by pressing his ear hard against the door he could hear a voice. It was quite audible once he discovered how to separate the sound of it from the beating of his heart.

He felt suddenly a little weak as though now, finally, when he stood within speaking distance of the man for whom he had searched since he had first set foot in Mexico, something would occur to prevent him from glimpsing the Leader or recognizing him if he did see him. Some trivial, ridiculous thing.

The voice was the cultured metallic voice he had heard many times. It came now, brittle and authoritative and he listened, holding his breath.

" . . . Men of the Bunds; men of German-America; I repeat my order for you to stand by, alert as always, but—as always—conforming to the letter with our Fuehrer's rigid policy of nonagression.

"I tell you again Germany and Mexico have no interest on the entire North American continent except the development of the most extensive trade possible with each state on that continent. Once more I say to you the German-Mexican army is on the move and nothing can hinder it. But remember this:

"We have no intention of crossing the border; we are merely bent upon quelling rebellion in our own country. We shall obliterate the revolutionist, Jorge Cázan. And I warn each and every American citizen that the Reich will protect with force, war if need be, any German-American in the United States should harm befall him.

"I caution all German-Americans to arm themselves; not for agression, but for self-preservation in the event the people of the United States are led to believe by their capitalistic government that our army moves against themselves. I repeat my solemn affirmation that we have no intention of crossing the United States border. The people of the United States do not want war. Nor do we. Therefore it is ridiculous . . ."

The voice faded and Rand realized that it was because he himself was breathing so loudly. The Leader still spoke, but he could no longer hear it. He looked at Marchant.

Marchant's face was white. "I was right," he said. "He is my father." Marchant leaned against the wall, his eyes closed, the muscles in his throat working.

Rand edged his eyes to the aperture. The light in his eyes blinded him at first but this passed and suddenly he received the full-lighted panorama of the big room and the figures in it.

For him there was only one basic figure before him—the man the Nazis called the Leader.

The room was huge; its walls and ceiling apparently were made of sound-absorbing hair felt or celotex. Directly across the room was a large door which must open onto the *ahuehuete* grove. At the opposite ends were the bases of the twin antenna towers, not over fifty inches in diameter and resting upon porcelain insulators which disappeared through the floor to a ground base. Both towers seemed cut off sharply at the snug holes in the ceiling through which they had been hoisted.

To the left a glass partition separated the main section of the floor from what was evidently the control room. A whitecoated engineer sat at the huge console, his ugly, jowled face framed in earphones, his eyes raised to look steadily at the volume indicator needle.

To the right a line of great water-cooled tubes, over six feet in height, rose from behind a long panel, bright red-white tracings of light glaring from each window in the panel.

Men were seated behind the Leader. Carlito Toledarez sat with his arms folded across his tightly filled brown shirt; next to him was the small immaculately dressed, black-mustached Issaku Suzuki, Japan's ambassador to Mexico; sitting beside Suzuki, smiling a little, was Herr Felix Habig, for the first time wearing a uniform of brown; and on the chair next to Habig sat a man whose lower face was hidden by a brown cloth wound behind his head and serving effectively as a gag.

He was in uniform and it was brown, but a much lighter brown than those of the others. He was a plump man and his eyes were dark and tragic and protruded in anger and disappointment. But Rand had not, at that moment, the time or inclination to identify him by remembering where he had last seen the peculiarly expressive eyes.

He could only stare at the figure of the Leader, rage and disgust and shock welling within him, fighting the impulse to grasp the Mauser and blast him down.

And at that moment he felt himself seized from behind. The door before him was snatched open and Stew Marchant was pushed forward into the arms of a white-coated Gestapo man who had pulled the door open from a spot outside Rand's line of vision.

THE WHITECOAT threw one arm around Marchant's waist and hoisted him off the floor, shoving a hand over his mouth. Then he threw him to the floor, kneeling on him.

The man who had shoved Marchant from behind, another whitecoat, was already through the door, helping his companion hold Marchant down.

The entire thing had happened with the unreal mute slowness of action under water. The Leader's flow of words had not once been interrupted by the disturbance.

Convulsively, Rand threw his chest and shoulders forward, but this motion did not succeed in breaking the grip on his arms. It did, however, free his mouth and he

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shouted with all the power he could pump into his lungs.

"Scotto Thorgensen!" His voice filled the room like the blast from an explosive. "Scotto, can you hear me? It's Rand! They're not stopping at Monterey. They're coming across the border!"

The man's hand tore savagely at his mouth but he ducked his head, eluded it for another moment. The others in the room stood paralyzed, staring in disbelief. Habig and Toledarez were drawing revolvers from their holsters. The whitecoat at the console wore a stupid, angry expression.

Only the Leader, standing at the microphone, appeared imperturbed. He turned and gestured to the man in the control room.

"If anybody can hear me," Rand shouted, "tell Scotto Thorgensen—in Maredo, Texas—to get in touch with Burton, get in touch with Washington—with the whole damn' United—"

His head exploded then. Things went white and red and black. The man behind him had hit him with the butt of a revolver as hard as he could.

Foggily, he heard the Leader say, "He has done no harm. Franz cut the microphone switch in time. And who would possibly believe him in any case?"

He felt the explosion in his head again and knew that he had been hit a second time. It hurt but it didn't matter. Not half so much as his discovery that the large tragic dark eyes above the gagged mouth of the bound man belonged to General Jorge Cázan. And that meant that the *Panzer* division which was rushing north along the International Highway would not halt at Monterey for Cázan the revolutionist, because he was here.

No, the *Panzer* would thrust higher, and it could thrust no higher unless it gushed across the Border—

And the darkness and pain in his head were as nothing compared with the despair and shock which recognition of the bristling gray mustache and blunt blue eyes and hard thin nose of General Sam Thresher, the Leader, had pulled down upon him.

He wondered if it were raining outside. It felt as if it were raining in his head. . . .

CHAPTER XXXII

THURSDAY AT FIVE

BETWEEN TWO and three days had passed since he and Marchant had been brought into the soundproof room. Rand couldn't be sure how long he had lain, securely bound, on the heavy rug. But Marchant told him it was nearly three days.

And that was important.

Not having suffered two vigorous blows over the head from the butt of a revolver, Marchant was clear enough to estimate time and distances. It was 1,226 kilometers, or approximately seven hundred seventy-two miles from Mexico City to Maredo on the Texas side of the Rio Grande. Therefore, he reasoned, with the *Panzer* and *Schnell* divisions traveling two hundred fifty miles a day they should reach the international bridge at Maredo around five o'clock on the afternoon of the third day, Thursday, at five, maybe a little earlier or later.

It was Thursday now and the clock on the wall above the microphone said it was twenty minutes after four.

Rand lay quietly, swallowing and breathing through his mouth for the relief it brought him to be able to breathe through his mouth. Except for the brief minutes when Johann Kleinmichel brought food and when, as now, this room was not in use, he and Marchant had spent the time with sour gags in their mouths. That was because the Leader was almost continuously broadcasting and if you were choking and mute you couldn't create an inconvenient disturbance.

And although the Leader did not wish them to use their mouths when he spoke, it gave him acute pleasure for them to use their ears. He had told them that the first day.

Sometimes, while he was speaking, he would turn to glance at them, his face calm.

When Johann Kleinmichel had appeared with the first of their daily solitary meals, an excited hope had pumped inside Rand's chest. But the Englishman's look of disgust and piercing admonition had dispelled any thought that he would provide even the smallest amount of assistance.

His silent lips had formed the words, "We cannot help you."

So nothing would come from Elsa or Johann.

HE TRIED not to think of Elsa. In a matter of this sort there were larger and more essential facts to consider. Still, a man who was helpless and who had done what he could, could not additionally injure his country or his country's security by wondering about the welfare of someone with freckles across the bridge of her nose and long slender legs and hair the color of September wheat. Those thoughts weren't vital, but they were the thoughts he had.

There was no one in the room at present except the engineer at the console behind the glass partition. Rand watched the small bulb above the door which opened from the passageway. When the door at the outer end of the passage was opened this bulb automatically flashed its red warning. That was how he and Marchant had been caught.

Exactly, he thought, as Frank Dana Brady had been caught. Brady, a capable member of the F.B.I., who had worked hand in glove with General Fighting Sam Thresher and never known about the General until the night he must have pressed his face against the aperture in the passageway door as Rand and Marchant had gone—too late.

But Brady and they hadn't been the only ones deceived by Thresher. Were there more like Thresher in Washington at this moment? Officials who had been bought and who could effectively counteract any concerted last-moment rush for active defense against the machine which at this moment should be reaching the border?

It was something to think about. He had been thinking about it for more hours than he could remember. He had thought about it while he and Marchant lay listening to Thresher's calm-voiced assurance to Washington that the objective of the machine moving up the International Highway was solely and indisputably to stamp out General Cázan's revolution in Monterey.

He had wondered where Washington thought General Sam Thresher was in this time of pending crisis. He had asked Marchant about it during the minutes the cloths were removed from their mouths.

"He's been at this a long time," Marchant said. "He's pulled all kinds of wool over all kinds of people's eyes. And then there are plenty of his organization in Washington to front for him when he isn't there. He gets sick a lot and can't see anybody. He's got a reputable physician in Washington who'll forbid him any activity or forbid anybody to see him whenever he wants. Usually when they think he's ill at his home he's made a quick flight down here. He can leave Washington at six in the evening and be in Maxico City by the time the shops open the next morning. The nature of his job with the government has always been independent. He's trusted. He's liable to put in an appearance or disappear at any place at any time."

Marchant's bitterness was not belligerent. It was quiet and deep.

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"THEY don't come any more shrewd than he is. Look at his use of the filter mike. Millions of people are familiar with Fighting Sam Thresher's voice over the air. But not one would recognize it when it comes through the filter. I was never certain myself."

It was odd, hearing Marchant speak of the man who was his father as he might have of an opponent whose principles he despised but whose ability he did not under estimate.

Rand could understand how ingenious was the Nazi method of selecting the men who paved the way for German entry into the country. The choice of Thresher was an example.

They had not forgotten the man who had made use of the precarious excitement of war to elevate himself from an unknown private to the captain of a company. Here was an ideal instrument for the hand of National Socialism. Here was a man who prospered vigorously when faced with the ruction, the danger, and the chaos of war. Excitement apparently spurred him to achievement. Violence and risk appeared to awaken him.

And the same man, confronted by years of peace, had fallen into lethargy, resenting his relegation to the storeroom of forgotten heroes, wallowing in the bitter muck of spiteful inactivity; living with his son in a tenement infested by rats which he shot with the rifle that had come to be merely a relic of his brief greatness.

He was ripe for the approach of men who promised to restore him to his former prominence, who were willing to pay generously for his assistance in formulating a government and a way of life which would never tolerate oblivion for its war heroes.

They found him in 1933 and Marchant remembered the years after that had been filled with pleasant transitions for himself. Although for some reason his father deemed it wise for him to change his name, Marchant was concerned at the time only with the unexpected advantages of preparatory school, college, a possibility of a job of his own choosing and a father of whom he became more proud with the passage of each year.

Sam Thresher's war record stood him in good stead and with the monetary backing and influence of the power behind him he had found seven years ample time in which to climb to the top of the ladder. He was an impressive man in the government when he approached his son, revealing his true work and asking for his approval, gratitude and assistance.

"I refused," Marchant said. "And immediately I became dangerous because I knew too much. So he forced me out of the States. Perhaps he believed my work for the Nazis here was genuine. Perhaps he was never deceived. In any case, it's over now. The taste of failure in your mouth isn't pleasant. But by now you know the taste too."

"Yes," Rand said.

FRANZ, the engineer at the console, who also acted in the capacity of guard while the others caught fitful naps in the villa during their brief spells away from the room, opened the door in the glass partition and came over.

He bent over Rand, picking up the strip of brown cloth which lay on the floor beside his head.

"Both of you speak too much," he said. He wound the gag around Rand's head, tightly, so that the cloth tore the corners of his mouth. Then he did the same to Marchant and returned to the console.

Rand lay still. He raised his eyes to the clock above the microphone. It lacked five minutes of being five o'clock.

For a moment he watched the strong red traceries of light in the windows of the panel which concealed the enormous tubes. Then another light caught his attention. The bulb over the passageway door was flashing. Presently the door opened and General Thresher, followed by Habig and three of the Gestapo men, came into the room. The men had changed their white coats for full uniform.

The tall white-haired general glanced briefly at Rand. Then his eyes moved over the prone figure of his son. Rand watched the blunt unwavering blueness of them. The look almost confirmed what had been swimming about in his head for the last two days. It didn't make sense but there it was.

Then the General's voice was filling the room as he poured its metallic precision into the microphone. His words were ostensibly directed to the short-wave sets with which the tanks, armored cars, batteries and planes of the *Panzer* and *Schnell* divisions were equipped. He was issuing commands to Toledarez, who had flown up to take command of the divisions as they were about to enter Monterey.

His orders were that under no condition were the divisions to move farther north once the insurrection in Monterey has been quelled—not even in the event any of the insurrectionists escaped in that direction. He furnished complete instructions for sparing the life of General Jorge Cázan in order that he might be brought back to Mexico City and be provided with a military trial, as was the exemplary custom of the Third Reich.

Rand heard this and remembered the night, less than forty-eight hours ago, when he had first regained consciousness. The Gestapo men were releasing Cázan's bonds and escorting him to the door which opened into the *Ahuehuete* grove. The quiet, double-chinned little general with the light skin and neat uniform shook off their support although he had remained cramped in a position that would have paralyzed most men.

He walked jerkily but erectly to the door. If he knew what was about to happen to him he gave no sign. He turned and his dark tragic honest eyes fixed upon General Thresher. There was a bright contempt in the eyes. But the little man said nothing.

Then he preceded the Gestapo men into the grove and a few minutes later through the open door there had come the ragged flat popping of a pistol volley.

NOW THRESHER was glibly providing instructions for the safety of the little man. Rand knew the words were but a part of the assurances intended to deceive. But he saw no reason why they would not be successful. Identical promises has been desperately accepted by Austria, Poland, Holland and countries better prepared than the United States.

Now he heard Thresher's voice grow suddenly harsh and explosive. Rand turned his head and looked at Marchant. Then he regarded the Leader again. Thresher was ordering the complete demolition of Monterey.

Rand gathered that the rebels had made some small show of resistance and had then secured themselves in the partisan homes of Monterey, making it necessary for the divisions to destroy the city itself in order to wipe out hidden insurrectionists. He saw with what cold insensibility Thresher barked the order that would bring the destruction of the entire city if necessary.

But the business, devastating as it was, would require a certain amount of time. It would mean a delay. Perhaps of only several hours. But the *Panzer* and *Schnell* moved on calculations of minutes, not hours. An hour's delay meant the difference between daylight and darkness. He wondered how long the delay would last; and what if anything could be gained by it.

Thresher ceased speaking and gestured his hand to Franz at the console. He spoke rapidly in a low tone to

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Habig. Habig made no answer. Several times he nodded his ugly head. It was evident he was in the habit of listening—not speaking—to General Sam Thresher.

Thresher crossed the room and stood for a moment, looking down at Marchant. He said quietly, "You see how futile your efforts were in the face of what is occurring?"

Marchant turned his eyes away from his father.

Rand noticed this and watched the nostrils of Thresher's thin nose flute. He recalled the cold apathy the General had displayed when ordering the mechanized massacre of an entire city. Things were adding up in his head incongruously; but they were adding up.

Thresher left the room without a glance at Rand. Habig followed, pausing at the door to turn his body and head so that his glassy eyes pointed at Rand. He smiled. His voice held the edge of restraint rather than triumph.

"By six-thirty in the morning, our divisions will be on the road to Houston, Texas. Long before nightfall we shall have occupied that city. I wonder, Herr Mansfield, if you would care to send that story to your paper? I am certain your friend, Herr Thorgensen, would enjoy doing a caricature of me as I enter Houston. He is excellent at high-lighting the obvious. Or do you remember?"

He went out, closing the door after him. Presently the red bulb ceased flashing and Rand knew that the door at the end of the passage had been closed.

Once again he tried sawing his hands behind his back. The skin was already raw and now the pain was so intense that he stopped. He wished he could speak with Marchant. Still, there were so many things to be done and that business in Monterey had provided a small grace of time.

He squirmed about so that he was in a position to look at Franz in the control room.

Franz had left the console and was standing, his nose pressed flat against the glass partition, watching Rand. . . .

CHAPTER XXXIII

DEATH HAS A TIMETABLE

THE NIGHT dragged interminably. At intervals Thresher entered and announced his commands with a concise clarity that left no doubt as to how things were faring in Monterey. He referred constantly to a map and spoke of bridges, sharp turns, steep inclines and villages as though he were conducting a tour of the International Highway.

Johann Kleinmichel had not appeared with their food by three o'clock, making it evident that they were not going to receive any until the morning.

At three-thirty a man Thresher addressed as Werner took Franz's place in the control room. But the newcomer was even more alert than Franz. From time to time he inspected their bonds. He made no attempt to remove the gags from their mouths.

Most likely, Rand thought, everyone was in the living room of the villa. They had made it their headquarters and he understood that at night they listened there to the progress of the divisions from a receiving set which picked up the short-wave broadcasts from the units themselves as they moved. In the daytime they listened in the control room.

He wondered what had happened at Monterey and whether Maredo would meet the same fate. He had caught a glimpse of those divisions and impulsively, feeling ashamed of his hope, he hoped Maredo would offer no resistance.

He could still see that nightmarish mechanized procession. Immediately after he had fallen unconscious from the revolver blows on his head three nights ago, Thresher had had him revived. He came to with that acute clarity mind which illumines men for a short period after they have been severely injured.

Thresher's attitude was filled with a quietly enraged triumph.

"I want to thank you," his deep voice licked at Rand, "for the successful completion of the work I assigned to you. I couldn't have spoken my gratitude to an unconscious man."

"I was beginning to believe you had failed me," Thresher said. "But when you brought him"—his marble hard eyes turned on Marchant—"here, helping to reveal him for what he is, you completed your mission satisfactorily."

Characteristically, the General's blunt exposition took very little time. He had to make it to satisfy something within him.

He had selected Rand and Scotto for the mission to Mexico for two reasons: first, to serve as leak-detectors, relaying the information they were able to discover concerning the Nazi organization through the unsuspecting Brady to Thresher in Washington, thereby enabling him to patch up the leaks; and second, because of their old friendship for his son, to test Marchant, to cause him to confide his genuine motives to them. Accordingly, aware of Marchant's evening visits to the Countess von Hochenlobe, the General had arranged to have the Americans remain at the Santoyo where they could conveniently meet Marchant in private.

But the Countess and Marchant had inadvertently combined to circumvent the General's plans; the Countess by her refusal to let them remain at the villa; Marchant by his resolute, distrustful silence even with old friends.

"So, when finally he came sneaking here with you, my suspicions were confirmed," the General said. "It is to you I owe my gratitude. I am no ingrate. I reward those who serve me. I shall permit you to observe a thing you will never see the like of again."

HIS HEAD sick and dizzy, but achingly impressionable, Rand had been escorted to a knoll overlooked which overlooked the International Highway where it passed the Santoyo.

He had not thought ever to witness a sight such as the one that rolled over the smooth road beneath him. It was frightful and devilish and at the same time uncannily thrilling.

Flares carried on moving vehicles aided his vision.

The countless motorcycles and low-hung reconnaissance cars swept by in advance; then the armored cars, a steel ribbon of them, flowing with the flares glinting weirdly against their sides; then the whippet tanks, from six to ten tons, moving at their furious scuttling pace, their three-inch guns jutting and throwing shadows down their sides; then truck after truck after truck of wireless men, anti-tank squads with their wicked snout-mouthed machine guns, engineers with prefabricated bridges ready for instant construction, repair crews to salvage a tank in the midst of action; and finally the fuel trucks which could lay smoke screens and refuel armored cars, tanks and the smaller, speedier vehicles.

After what seemed to be hours, they were gone and there was nothing left except the throb that the planes overhead had set up in his brain. It was queer how you didn't notice the planes or their sounds until everything had gone. Then you remembered them most.

Later, Herr Habig took the trouble to point out, would come the crunch of booted feet, the juggernaut tramp of masses of marching men.

But Rand couldn't wait for that. His head was bursting and he was beginning to be actively sick.

They did not permit him to lie down. In the radio room

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Thresher spoke to Marchant and to him, watching for the effect of his words on their faces, in their eyes.

He told them of the gradual process of the German infiltration of Mexico; of the more than one hundred thousand Nazis who had entered the Republic illegally in the last two years. Tourists, he explained, who became "lost." A part of their number officered the *Panzer* and *Schnell* divisions, he said, and many of them had been flown across the American border and dropped by parachutes in Texas, New Mexico, Arizona and California, equipped with small cans of acid to destroy their parchutes so that they disappeared like the night into which the men had been cast.

He spoke of the American Pacific Fleet, unable to race from the Hawaiian Islands in time to hamper the advance of the Divisions; and of the depleted Atlantic Squadron scattered from St. Thomas to Nova Scotia on neutrality patrols; he spoke lightly of the acquisition of bases from England, dismissing them with, "They tell you that you have acquired new bases from Newfoundland to the West Indies. But what have you done other than the lease and the ground?"

He spoke of the work of the fifth columnists who, at the signal from him, were in a position to sabotage railroads, munitions plants and armories, airports, release pneumonia germs in both conscription and regular army camps, and in general precipitate a state of chaos which would render American resistance anemic.

"You see how completely we have foreseen and eliminated any concerted American resistance?" He laughed. His laughter was quiet, his tone convincing with an assurance that was not braggadocio. "The Fuehrer has said, 'America is permanently on the brink of revolution. It will be a simple matter for me to produce unrest and revolts in the United States, so that these gentry will have their hands full with their own affairs.' Can you understand how simple that task has been?"

The pain was returning to Rand's head, making it alternately hot and cold. He heard Thresher's words dimly, as a sleepy student hears the professor's words, drone-like.

"You are already a race of malcontents. You are waiting for revolution and disunion."

It was queer how he used the word "you," thereby disassociating himself from Americans. But everything was queer, Rand thought, and there was a wire binding his head tightly. He sensed that the General was addressing his next words to Marchant.

"You had a chance to be a part of all this and renounced it. And in doing so you renounced me and everything I have worked toward, everything which enabled me to provide you with the opportunities that I never had—"

But Rand's pain let him hear no more. . . .

NOW, a night and two days later, he was lying here waiting for morning to drag upon him, helpless in the hands of his own thoughts, while he knew the *Panzer* and *Schnell* to be rushing under the blanket of darkness from Monterey up the Highway to the bridge at Maredo. There would be no question of their finding the bridge intact. The parachute troops had atended to that. Or if by some miracle it were destroyed, the engineers would throw up a temporary one quicker than it had taken to demolish the original.

He rolled on his side to relieve the pressure of numbness from his back.

The room had no windows and he could not tell if it was becoming gray outside or not. At five o'clock Johann Kleinmichel brought Werner his breakfast. He did not glance at the figures on the floor except when Werner pointed to them and laughed. Then Johann looked at them and laughed too. He adjusted dials and spoke with Werner about the console. Rand couldn't hear their voices but it was evident Werner respected Johann's knowledge of radio, as he kept nodding his head.

Then Johann left and Rand watched the hand of the clock crawl around to six.

At six-ten General Thresher came in, followed a few minutes later by Habig. At six-fifteen Thresher began to speak over the air.

He read from a black leather-bound notebook. The sentences were brief, childish exhortations, such as: "The men of the Heart are true men. The men of the Soul are fine men. The men of the Mind are logical men."

Rand twisted his head and looked at Marchant, who nodded, and Rand knew the General was sending the signal in code for the various Bunds and fifth columnists to touch off their sabotage.

At six-twenty-five the General ceased speaking and the microphone was cut off. Thresher spoke briefly to Habig and Habig walked over to Rand, bowing a little and saying companionably:

"It is my misfortune to inform you of your execution, Herr Mansfield. You are to be taken out and shot. It is regrettable but if you will remember I warned you that inevitably it becomes the fate of all agents who work against the Reich." His thin shoulders rose and fell. "However, as is the custom in your country, you are to be given breakfast if you wish it."

Johann Kleinmichel had stepped into Rand's line of vision. He carried a tray which he laid upon the floor and methodically went about the business of untying Rand's hands and taking the gag from his mouth.

He swallowed and drew his breath through his mouth. He chafed his hands. He tried the coffee, finding it bitter and Mexican, as was the peppery chile con carne. He was extremely hungry and ate as much as he could.

When he had finished Johann Kleinmichel replaced the gag and tied his hands behind his back and then untied his ankles.

Almost at once two of the brown-shirted Gestapo men entered and lifted him to his feet. He could barely stand and they were forced to support him. One of them bent and hurriedly kneaded the muscles of his legs.

Again he felt unreal, detached as a spectator is detached, as he had felt when he had been led to his intended execution in the prison in Mexico City. For some reason he was once more impressed with the fact that they were going to shoot him with pistols instead of rifles.

Only then did the realization come to him that the tiny object, which Johann Kleinmichel had placed in his hands as he had retied them, was still clutched by his fingers. What the use of it would avail him he could not see, but Johann's lips had formed the words, "This will help," and it occurred to him that Johann must have offered the object as a first step.

One of the Gestapo men said, "You can walk, can you not?"

He took a tentative step, wobbling a bit. Then they took him by the arms, supporting him, and began moving toward the door that opened into the *ahuehuete* grove.

But General Thresher's upraised hand halted them. He had been intently studying the clock above him. Now he signaled to Werner at the console.

It was exactly six-forty-five.

CHAPTER XXXIV

MISSION FULFILLED

RAND COULD not tell how he knew that the full volume and power of the transmitter was now being utilized for the first time since he had entered the room three days

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ago. Perhaps it was merely the elevated note of the General's voice. In any case he realized that now the voice was intended to reach as far into the United States as the wave-band would permit.

He was choking quietly because of the hand which had been clamped over his mouth from behind. His restricted struggles could not dislodge the sour-tasting palm from his mouth.

Thresher's voice filled the room. It was angry and brittle and there was a cold note of outrage overtoning its vehemence.

"To the people and government of the United States. . . . The Republic of Mexico and the Third Reich of Germany have received the shocking news of the brutal murder in Houston, Texas, of a German, high in the official ranks of the National Socialist Party, and of two Mexican citizens, also preëminent government officials.

"We have warned you repeatedly that under no circumstances would we tolerate the abuse of German or Mexican citizens in the United States. You have ignored our warnings.

"The outrage perpetrated in Houston this morning shall not go unavenged. This vicious act has made it clear that it is necessary for the Mexico-German army to protect the lives of Mexican and German citizens.

"Already we are moving to prevent the reoccurrence of similar outrages. A part of our army is at this minute advancing upon Houston. We do not consider our act one of aggression, but one of necessity, as we intervene on behalf of an oppressed minority such as we were forced to do for the German people in the Sudeten and Poland. The world shall judge our justification.

"Not only have you provoked this action for the defense of our people, but in answering your challenge the Mexico-German army violates no international boundary, crosses no recognizable border! The territory of Texas in which the army moves, is and has always been the possession of the Republic of Mexico!

"We warn you not to resist. Resistance will mean war. You are not prepared for war. We are prepared to arbitrate for the territories belonging to us. We will not tolerate resistance. If resistance is offered we warn you the consequences will be chaotic—"

Rand threw his head and shoulders forward, kicking out and back with his right foot. He felt his heel contact a shin, but the hand over his mouth was not released. The two men holding him propelled him through the door which Habig had suddenly opened. The voice of the Leader, when the door closed, ceased as though hands had been clapped over Rand's ears.

Yet the words he had heard continued to sound in his mind, to echo there with a peculiar and terrible resonance.

IN THE grayness the bases of the *ahuehuete* trees appeared smaller than they were. He imagined it remained gray in the grove even when the sun had risen; the trees were that high and closely bunched.

They walked on either side of him, their hands impersonally supporting his shoulders. It was very cold but the numbness from cramp had left his legs and body, and his mind seemed abnormally sharp. As he walked he continued to saw at the tough cord ringing his left wrist with the razor blade, manipulating it precariously with the ends of the fingers of his right hand and not letting the motions reach his shoulder.

The path opened into a small clearing as the blade bit through the last strand, freeing his hands but leaving the cord dangling from his right wrist. He let the blade drop and kept his hands in the position they had been when tied.

He was trembling only slightly.

One of the men turned him by the left shoulder and backed him against the base of a tree. The other stood several yards away and took his Mauser from its holster and examined it in the gray half-light.

He saw that neither of them was going to ask him anything or say anything.

In the clearing a mist had settled, like smoky dregs, close to the ground. The legs of the two men from their knees down were obscured.

"I'd like to have something over my eyes," he said. It was queer the way he felt, the absence of fear, the absolute loss of reality.

Both men grunted. The man nearest him took a handkerchief from his pocket and handed it to him and then, remembering that his hands were bound behind him, came up and lifted the handkerchief and began to wind it around his head.

Rand put his hand gently on the Mauser butt protruding from the man's holster, bringing his knee up into the man's groin as hard as he could.

The man gasped with an agonized intake of breath and bent over as the other man swore gutturally and fired and swore again because his bullet had caught his comrade in the back.

Rand took a quick step to one side as the wounded man fell and then dropped on his knee behind the man and fired at the standing man and watched him kneel and shake his head and then slide forward on his face.

He got up, thinking that with the door closed those in the soundproof broadcast room would not have heard the shots.

The first indication he had that Habig had stepped into the clearing with a leveled revolver was the sound of his impersonal voice.

"Drop the Mauser, Herr Mansfield, or I shall shoot you in the side. Turn toward me, please. I imagined something of this sort might happen. It will be better if you keep quite still. If you make any move my bullet will most likely strike you awkwardly and painfully, necessitating my shooting you twice. . . ."

EARLIER the same morning, at exactly fifteen minutes after five in a suite in the Merlin Hotel in Houston, Texas, Herr Rolf Konstantin got up from the chair in which he had been sitting all night, shivered a little in the cold, crossed the room and put down the window which opened over the boulevard six floors below.

He couldn't see any sign of light outside; dawn was still more than an hour away. He checked his wristwatch, grinning a little at the illuminated dial. It was odd, he thought, checking your watch to make certain you would not be late with your own death.

He moved back to the chair and switched on the table lamp. The light caught the unopened bottle of cognac which stood on the floor next to the right leg of the chair. He grinned companionably at the bottle. There was humor in his grin. That was funny, was it not? Rolf Konstantin sitting awake all night beside a bottle of fine French brandy and leaving it untouched. It was the first time he had been sober for so many consecutive hours since he didn't remember when.

But this night, he had thought when he began it, is a special night because it is the last. And so he would enjoy his thoughts unenhanced by cognac and they would be pleasant thoughts of Berlin and the castle in the Rhinelands in the old days before the words "social order" had supplanted the gallant beauty of the word "régime."

But he could not localize his thoughts without including a hideous man's bald-appearing head and glassy, immobile eyes and lead-colored transparent skin. He could not get away from this man, even in his inner thoughts.

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Now, with the time near and knowing what he had to do, he found it in him to smile and discard hatred and sadness and the feeling was as stimulating as the brandy could have been.

He opened the door leading into the bedroom adjoining his own. In the dark he could not make out the figures sleeping peaceably in the twin beds. He switched on the ceiling light, went over and first awoke Garcia and then Alfaro. Because they were Mexicans they did not come quickly awake. They sat up, yawning and rubbing their eyes and blinking at him. Then they smiled.

"Cómo?" Alfaro said.

"You must get up quickly," Konstantin said in Spanish.

"Si. If you say. But is early."

"I am sorry."

"De nada."

He watched them dress with clumsy good humor. They were eminent, if superfluous, members of President Del Rio's cabinet. They were pleasant chaps, he thought, and had absolutely no idea why they had been dispatched by Herr Habig to accompany Rolf Konstantin to Houston.

He told them he had received a telephone message from Mexico City and they were to go down the street to the all-night restaurant and wait for him there. They smiled sleepily and nodded.

After they had gone he entered his room and took from the cupboard shelf a square steel strongbox, carried it to the writing desk, sat down and opened it with the key he took from his key-ring.

The box was empty. He examined it. At the boulevard store where he had purchased it they had guaranteed its sturdy strength. "That box will resist anything," they said. "You could dump a ton of granite on it and besides denting it a bit there wouldn't be any harm done."

He was glad of that. It was important that the box should remain intact.

HE PUT it aside and took pen and writing paper from the desk. He glanced at his watch. It was ten minutes to six. There was ample time.

He wrote uninterruptedly. The facile flow of words covered the front and back of the paper. Then he signed his name. He put the paper and his identification papers in the strongbox, locked it and left the key in the lock. He put the box in the cupboard. They will look there, he thought; they will certainly look in the cupboard if there is anything left of the cupboard.

He thought, smiling, of what he had written.

"To the Citizens of the United States, whom this vitally concerns."

Not very impressive or clever; but to the point. And sincere.

The paper explained his "mission." He gave an example by citing the incident of the bombing of the Hofbrauhaus in Munich. That was the attempted assassination of *der Fuehrer*. He explained carefully the necessity of an excuse to embroil popular opinion against England.

One of Rolf's old friends, Prince Rudolph Wittge Stefield, had been selected as the "missionist" by the Fuehrer on that occasion. The Fuehrer had completed his speech a minute and a half ahead of schedule and left, while Rudy sat with the neat innocent-appearing briefcase across his knees two feet from where the Fuehrer had stood.

When the explosion occurred, Rudy and many of the Fuehrer's friends were torn to pieces, but it didn't matter because the "English" had done it and popular opinion was catapulted into a frenzy against the English.

That was the way of it. The Fuehrer selected men of note and birth who were not ardent supporters of himself, for his "missionists." Losing them did not injure the Party and the missionists were important enough in themselves to gain a great deal of posthumous Nazi glorifying.

But because they must be important, as well as superfluous, they were rare, and therefore inviolate. Rolf had enjoyed a great deal of immunity at Herr Habig's expense because of this.

It was all in the note in the strongbox. It was all there. It explained how Rolf and the Mexican cabinet members had been selected and how their "murder" would serve as a "cause for protection". He had been very lucid and very careful in the writing of it. He wanted nothing misinterpreted.

Now he went to the cupboard and carried out the neat black traveling case. Herr Habig had presented it to him, smiling and saying, "No greater glory than to open this bag for the Fuehrer, for the Third Reich, for your fellow countrymen. *Deutschland über Alles.*" Extremely patriotic, Herr Habig, smiling at his and Rolf's private joke and rubbing his bald-appearing head in a gesture of great satisfaction.

Now Rolf placed the traveling case at the foot of the chair, picked up the cognac bottle and at last poured himself a drink.

He looked down at the bag. He did not understand how it worked except that you only had to unsnap the lock and start to lift the lid.

He sat down and lifted his drink. It had been a fine idea to send the Mexicans from the room. He hoped there wouldn't be too much damage done beneath him. Explosives, he had heard, blew downward; but the ceilings were high.

It was exactly six-thirty. He brought his glass to his lips. At six-forty-five they would announce the "news" from Mexico. But the contents of the little strongbox would be inconvenient for many people. Most of all, he thought, for the stable-man who had had aspirations that were at once lofty and base.

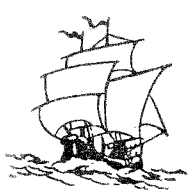
"Prosit, Herr Habig," he said, and drank a little of the cognac and set the glass on the table.

He leaned over and unsnapped the lock of the traveling bag. His face was wet. He couldn't, at the last, manage a smile. The lid did not raise easily and he had to pull at it.

The last thought he had as everything about him seemed to tear quickly and violently apart, was of the signature he had affixed to the note in the strongbox. For he had signed his full name: Count Rolf Konstantin von Hochenlobe.

His sister Nata, he thought, would like that.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK



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Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

SOME time back we amused ourselves (and you, we hope) with the idea of a meeting between ARGOSY heroes and ARGOSY readers. We said then that quite probably the readers would display a surprising knowledge of out-of-the-way places and curious professions. But now we've got a much better scheme: We're going to run an ARGOSY carnival.

What put us in mind of this was a letter, which appears below. Its author has a trained-dog act; he says he is the possessor of America's champion trick dog. Well, starting off with that gentleman and his dog, we will easily be able to produce a show that will knock Billy Rose's eyes out. Readers will take part; ARGOSY characters; and of course their creators, the authors.

We know of two authors who are skilled magicians—sleight-of-hand men. There are boxers among our readers who would undoubtedly be willing to go a few rounds with, say, Refugee Smith. Mr. E. Hoffmann Price is a fencer, and we'll match him against both Cleve and D'Entreville. Any Argonotes reader knows that there are innumerable crack shots to call upon. Fan dancers—we don't know for sure; but we once ran a story about Cleopatra.

Don't crowd, folks. We are going out right now and hire Madison Square Garden. Bring sandwiches and blankets because the show will last several days.

Here is the reader with the trick dog. He has some sharp things to say about Jim Kjelgaard's Western lore.

TEXAS JACK

Please allow me to introduce myself and cry on your shoulder a little. My name is William J. Bruce—"Texas Jack." Have a dog act, have a dog that is considered America's champion trick dog by every audience I have played to.

Twenty-three years ago I punched cows in Wyoming and Colorado. Used to sit around camp fires at cattle roundups and in bunkhouses of an evening and listen to the old-timers tell of early-day events.

Now here's my complaint. I have read ARGOSY off and on for thirty years. Was very fond of Jim Kjelgaard's stories till just a short time ago when I got my ARGOSY. And Jim had a Western story in it. I read a few lines and got so disgusted I threw it away. I wonder if Jim ever faced a Wyoming blizzard. I have, and I have never heard of an old-time Western scout wearing a derby hat in a blizzard or of a young boy throwing a green buffalo hide on a horse.

Just came back from playing at Boise, Idaho. Stopped off at Granger, Wyoming, on the way back. If you know your Western history, you know that Granger was an early-day army post, and now has a museum of Western relics. Jim Bridger's daughter and squaw wife are buried there. The custodian of the museum is an old-time cowpuncher and rancher. We had a big visit and I told him about the silly story Jim Kjelgaard had in your magazine, and we both had a good laugh on it.

Now if Jim will stick to his Dabbit Run stories, he'll be all right. If you want to print some real Westerns, you should get a-holt of Walt Coburn. But don't print Western junk, for there's too many old-time Westerners who read your magazine.

Am reading my May 24th copy. "Citizen Moose" by Francis Gott is very good. Yours for a very good ARGOSY.
Kearney, Nebraska.

TEXAS JACK obviously hasn't been following ARGOSY with care. For we've published five or more Coburn stories within the last year.

Our next correspondent wants a reprint magazine of ARGOSY's most celebrated stories. To some extent that's already being done; *Famous Fantastic Mysteries* draws its fine novels from the back files of ARGOSY, and the same is true of *Crack-Shot Western*.

EMMETT GEIBEL

I have been reading ARGOSY for the last fifteen years and have no kicks to make. Some of the stories I didn't care so much for, but they were few and far between.

What I want is a chance to read again the outstanding stories of the last fifteen years and the others before that, clear back to 1882. So how about a new reprint magazine in a monthly, quarterly, semi-annually or any old way? How about giving it a good think before throwing this in the wastebasket?

I know a lot of the stories have been printed in book form, but books are harder to get hold of than magazines, and there were plenty of them that never were reprinted anyhow.
Detroit, Michigan.

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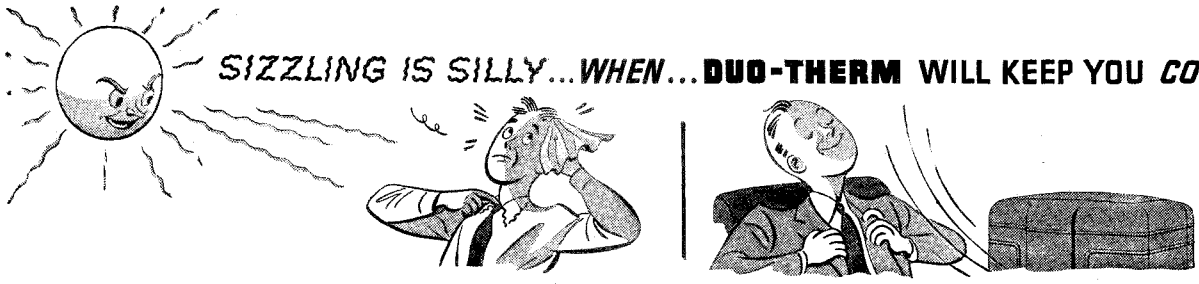

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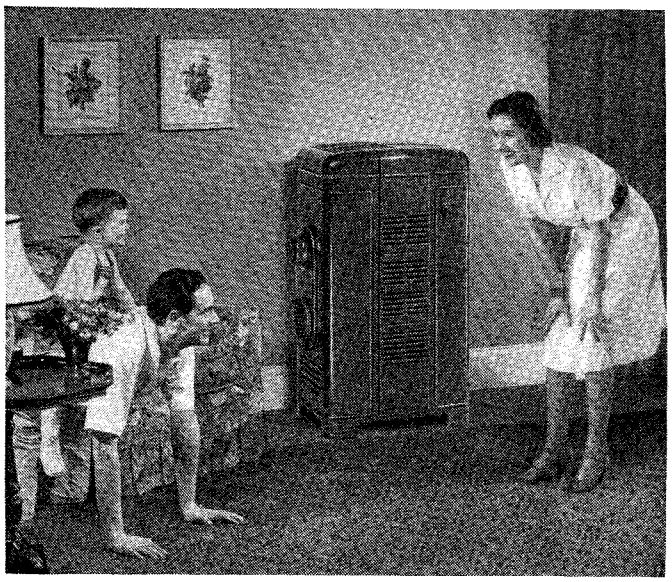

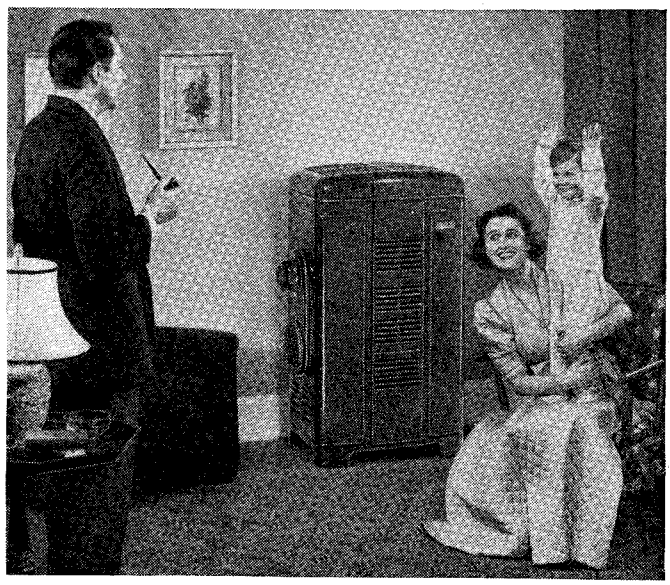

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EXTRA FEATURES! Handy Front Dial gives just the heat you want —and *Coordinated Control* insures proper draft for perfect combustion! *Radiant Doors* open to give floods of "fireplace" warmth! Special *Waste-Stopper* saves fuel. *Safe!* Duo-Therms are listed as standard by the Underwriters' Laboratories.

2. **AMAZING NEW *PERFORMANCE!*** Duo-Therm's new, *improved* Dual-Chamber Burner (patented), and Duo-Therm's new, exclusive Power-Air deliver an entirely new standard in heating comfort. Heat that is *not power-driven,* loafs at the ceiling. *Power-Air* drives lazy ceiling-heat *down,* giving you warm floors and *even* comfortable heating! And *Power-Air* is adjustable, to give you just the amount of circulation desired.

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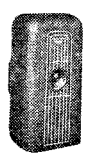

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